

**BIRTHS,
DEATHS, AND MARRIAGES.**



VOL. II.

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**BIRTHS,
DEATHS, AND MARRIAGES.**

BY THE AUTHOR OF
" SAYINGS & DOINGS ;" " MAXWELL ;" " JACK BRAG ;"
&c.

IN THREE VOLUMES,

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AND

MARRIAGES.

CHAPTER I.

It may naturally be supposed that Helen's feelings were not a little excited by the disclosure which had been made to her by her amiable friend during the morning; not that she was so much mortified by having become acquainted with a fact for the concealment of which from her knowledge there seemed to be no adequate cause, but because, being in possession of that, which for some reason or other Mortimer had chosen to make a secret, she felt that it would be impossible for her any longer to affect an ignorance of the existence of his favourite retreat; for, even if she en-

deavoured to conceal the knowledge she had so innocently and unintentionally acquired, she was certain that it would, even with the constant exercise of watchfulness over her words, which such a course of proceeding would demand, sooner or later “come out,” as the children say. Helen had nothing like caution in her speech, and, even if she had, premeditated and continuous deception was not compatible with the openness of her heart and mind : still, the warnings of the Countess, who appeared to know Mortimer’s character better than Helen did, weighed heavily upon her. — But why ? Mortimer, it is true, had never told her of this retreat, but, never having mentioned it, it followed of course that he had not prohibited her visit to it ; might it not be as the Countess said, that he purposed to surprise her by taking her thither himself ? The probability that this was really his intention was strengthened by the fact that the woman in charge of it had been making alterations in the furniture at the suggestion of the Countess herself, when she accompanied Mortimer thither a few days before.

This supposition pleased her, but the pleasure that it afforded was in some degree qualified by the recollection that the Countess *had* been Mortimer's companion on the occasion.

Helen felt the necessity of deciding, before her husband's return from Worcester, whether she should admit to him her having been at the cottage or not. If she did not tell him as soon as he arrived, or at least as soon as he inquired how the day had gone off in his absence, the time would be past for speaking of it. He could not be angry—he must have intended her to go to it at some time or other: besides, she had not sought it—she had been taken thither by *his* friend. It seemed so absurd to make a point of such a trifle—she *would* tell him;—and yet,—a dread of something, what she scarcely knew, came over her and shook her honest resolution.

In the midst of these conflicting feelings she determined to avail herself of the advantage of her father's presence, to tell him the circumstances, and take his advice. Nothing pleased Batley more than being consulted; no matter

what the subject, he flattered himself that he could arrange anything for anybody, however perplexing; in fact, the greater the entanglement of an affair, the more he was delighted, inasmuch as it afforded him a better opportunity of exhibiting the adroitness of his diplomacy. Of his advice might be said what Shakspeare says of Mercy,

“ It *pleaseth* him that gives and him that takes.”

Accordingly Helen rang the bell, determined to lay her case, which she had worked herself up to believe one of great importance, before her sire.

In this design she was, however, foiled, inasmuch as it appeared from her maid's account, that, after due and diligent search made for him, her father was not to be found. The delay which would arise before she could consult him was, however, rendered inconsequential, by the fact that Mortimer would certainly not return — if to dinner — until so late as to afford her an opportunity of submitting her difficulties for the consideration of

“Pappy” long before the subject of her anxiety could possibly come under discussion with her husband.

While therefore, Helen, as Carey says of Chrononhotonthologos,

“Unfatigues herself with gentle slumbers,”

and prepares for her toilet, we will draw the attention of the reader to the occurrences which had taken place under the roof of Sadgrove during the fair lady’s involuntary “voyage” of discovery.

Batley having concluded his ride with the ladies, and having most gallantly assisted them in dismounting at the door, found himself left *tête-à-tête* with Lady Melanie; and somewhat exhilarated by the extremely kind and lively manner of the gentle Laura, thought it no bad opportunity of pressing his suit, certain from sundry indications, which a man of the world can never mistake, that he would be instantly accepted. Upon his established principle, however, he thought it as well to ascertain the views of the mother of his intended upon the point, as, if she should exhibit any

symptoms of distaste for the union, he could shape his attack upon Laura in a more romantic manner, and win her over in opposition to the maternal mandate.

“My dear Lady Melanie,” said Batley, “you have no idea how happy I feel domesticated again in a family circle. The sudden deprivation of a mistress to my house by Helen’s marriage worried me sadly; and although I tried to laugh off my solitude by rallying friends round me, I found myself, after my little parties had broken up, even still more gloomy than I was before they had begun:—rely upon it, that without the soothing, calming influence of female society, the world is all a blank.”

“With such opinions,” said Lady Melanie, “I wonder you do not again try your fortune in that most interesting lottery of life, matrimony.”

—“Ah!” said Jack, “there it is! I assure you that thought has long occupied my mind, —and—only, to be sure, I am not very young.”——

—“No,” said Lady Melanie, “nor very old, Mr. Batley. For *my* part, I think there is a much greater chance of rational happiness in a marriage at more matured years, than in one formed at a time of life when the mind is made up to expect perfection which never exists, and when jealousy and all sorts of worries agitate the heart and feelings, for no reason upon earth.”

—“Do you really think so?” said Jack, drawing his chair nearer to the sofa on which his companion was seated. “I am delighted to hear such opinions from a person of so much taste and judgment as your ladyship. Is it, do you think, likely that you might ever be induced to give a practical corroboration of these sentiments?”

• “My dear Mr. Batley,” said her ladyship, evidently startled by the peculiar point and emphasis with which the question was asked, “what *do* you mean?”

“I mean,” said Batley, “if it should so occur that a man of about my time of life were to make such a proposition as you seem to think natural for a man in such a position as

mine to make, would you act upon the principle you appear to advocate?"

"Why," said Lady Melanie, "agreeing in your original view of your own particular position, as you call it, I think I should."

"Then," said Batley with increasing animation, "you *can* and *will* make me the happiest man living."

Saying which, Batley seized her ladyship's hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Dear Mr. Batley!" said her Ladyship.

"Dear Lady Melanie," said Mr. Batley, "you must have been aware, I am sure, of the existence of a feeling of the tenderest nature on my part towards one in whom I have flattered myself I saw every quality combined to ensure my happiness. I hesitated, and doubted, more particularly as your opinions and feelings were so deeply concerned upon the point to which you have now particularly referred. You know the extent of my fortune; you are aware of the place I hold in society; my house and establishment are familiar to you; and it would ill suit a man of *my* time of

life to say more than that as you seem to have anticipated my object, and are disposed to make me happy——”

“Why,” said Lady Melanie, “I confess I have sometimes thought I saw a disposition towards something of this sort, — but I doubted, — and” ——

“I felt that you were conscious,” said Jack, — “I rejoice to find you propitious; and I assure you, Lady Melanie, that if the most assiduous efforts to secure the happiness of a second wife, strengthened by the recollection of the excellence of a first, are likely to be successful, those you may rely upon: implicit devotion is my creed.”

“Really,” said Lady Melanie, “I—cannot—indeed the difficulty of answering — is” ——

“Of course,” said Batley. “If dear Laura should make any objections, — to those I am open: they may be overcome. In fact, I merely took the opportunity — the first I had — of throwing myself at your feet; — but if, however kind and gracious you are, and however ready you may be to listen to my petition, and

even confirm my wishes, still, if Laura objects in any degree,—I give you my honour, nothing like force must be used. If the gift be not a free gift, it is none ; so let it be left entirely to her decision.”

“ I am sure,” said Lady Melanie, looking sweeter than honey upon Jack, “ I am sure, Mr. Batley, that Laura will not oppose her mother upon this point ; —indeed,” added her ladyship with a still more benignant smile, “ Laura herself has anticipated this ;—*I* certainly did *not*,—but I suppose, being more sensitive at her age, she saw the progress of an attachment of which I confess I was not aware. I so much esteemed you, and was so much pleased with your society and conversation, that I easily fell into a constant association with you, certainly not prepared for such a termination of it.”

“ Then,” said Batley, catching her hand again, and again kissing it, “ may I hope ? —all I fear is Laura’s—eh !—she may—”

“ May what ?” said Lady Melanie, “ I tell you she herself first noticed your attentions ;

she confided her suspicions to me ; — besides, Mr. Batley, even if she *had* any scruples, I promise you, as a child of mine she would very soon overcome them.”

“ Yes,” said Batley, “ but, my dear Lady Melanie, I would not for the world put her to such a trial. I agree entirely with you ; but still, if there should be any repugnance ? ”

—“ Repugnance ! ” said her ladyship ; “ on the contrary, I do not think you do my girl justice. You should hear her talk of you in your absence : I do not — upon my word, I am not joking — I do not think that there is any dandy of the day — no — not the best of them, who stands so high in her estimation as yourself.”

“ Why,” said Batley, “ under the circumstances I hope not — eh ! — I should not like to play second fiddle to anybody. However, as I have already said, you have made me the happiest of men. — I may then, dear Lady Melanie, flatter myself ” — and he again kissed her hand — “ that you feel — in fact, you consider the matter settled.”

“ Why,” said Lady Melanie, drawing up, “ I should think, Mr. Batley, that having permitted the affair to go thus far, you can have very little doubt upon that point. I assure you,” added her ladyship, “ that my esteem, I may now call it, admiration of your character and talents is unbounded ; and when I recollect, in addition to all my personal regard for you, the advantage which my daughter will unquestionably receive from the connexion, I am not ashamed to own the pleasure I feel in the result of this conversation.”

And Lady Melanie wept, and Jack Batley drew quite close to the sofa, and Lady Melanie leant her cheek against his shoulder and wept more.

“ Calm yourself, dear Lady Melanie,” said Jack ; “ your emotion is natural. I can only say, that to secure the happiness of your daughter will be the object of my life : tell her not to fear that in my new character, as affecting *her*, she will ever experience anything like austerity, or jealousy, or indeed anything but a tender devotion to her best interests, and that

her feelings and *yours* will always be consulted by me upon every occasion and under all circumstances."

"You are a dear kind creature," said Lady Melanie to Jack, suiting the action to the word, and bestowing upon his sinister cheek a salute, chaste as Dian's, but which was evidently to be considered the seal of the compact.

"I confess," said Batley, "that it would complete my happiness to know that dear Laura——"

—"Rely upon it," said Lady Melanie, "I would not deceive you; I tell you she is prepared for all this: and as to her consent, of course if I ordered——"

—"Aye," said Jack, "but, as I have said, compulsion is not the course for me; —I——"

"Well then," said Lady Melanie, "I will put you at your ease, for I do believe you are a little fidgety; I will go and bring Laura here. I shall only keep you waiting while I take off my habit; and then you shall hear the meek, the beautiful, and dutiful submission of the young lady herself:—will that satisfy you?"

“ Perfectly,” said Jack ; “ satisfy is not the word ; it will enrapture me.”

“ Calm your raptures, and wait,” said her ladyship, who, in quitting the room, gave his hand a squeeze which presented to his view a legacy of everything she had to leave (in the character of his mother-in-law) to the gentle Laura.

As the door closed, there arose a bright vision before the mind’s eye of the imaginative Batley. He never had doubted that Laura was *his*,—actually snared—trapped—bagged ; but he certainly was not prepared for the ready acquiescence of her lady-mother. Mothers have strange notions about daughters ; and coronets and other mystical charms fly about in their sleeping or day dreams, which time and circumstances not unfrequently dissipate. Laura was a blue,—odious, as we have seen, to Mortimer, but not odious to Mortimer’s father-in-law, in consideration of certain “ appliances and means to boot,” by which he might, as an Amphytrion—for that was his

line — work his way into a position ready for political fight at the earliest opportunity.

It would be quite impossible to follow the fancies in which Batley indulged during the absence of his future *belle-mère*, — the scenes presented to his view, — the *éclat* of his marriage, — the sensation it would make, — the triumph he should enjoy over all the whiskered and unwhiskered dandies of London, in the possession of the rich Miss Thurston ; whence he descended into all the details of the marriage, carriage, &c., similar to those which had been exhibited on the morning of the Mortimeration of Helen, and thence into a disquisition as to the most suitable retirement for the honeymoon, and, in fact, into all the *minutiæ* of the most interesting ceremony that can possibly take place in the whole course of a man's life.

From this *reverie* he was aroused by the appearance of the gentle Laura, accompanied by her mother.

“ Here,” said Lady Melanie, throwing open the door, — “ here is the child herself.”

“ Dear Laura,” said Batley, catching her in his arms, “ this is too kind, too good of you.”

“ Not at all kind,” said Laura, “ not at all good. Don’t be cross with me, but as I love candour and truth I don’t mind, — I have expected this for the last month.”

“ Dear girl !” said Batley.

“ Mamma says,” said Laura, “ that you imagined that I should frown, and look angry, and say no, — dear me ! you ought to have found out by this time that whatever Mamma decides upon is immediately law with me.”

“ Angel !” said Batley.

“ I only wish,” said Laura, “ that you had spoken to me first ; for I own I should have liked to have been the bearer of the news to Mamma, so much do I know she esteems and regards you.”

“ Delicious girl !” said Batley.

“ Now,” said Lady Melanie, “ now you see how little you had to fear from any disinclination on *her* part ; I told you so, — no, no, Bat-

ley, rely upon it she never would run *contre* her mother's wishes."

"On the contrary," said Laura, "I do most sincerely assure you my wishes run ever before yours, and I am too delighted to see the result."

"Heaven bless you!" said Batley, catching Laura round the waist, and giving her one of those animated salutes which are perhaps not unnatural under such circumstances, but which young ladies sometimes hesitate to accept "before company."

"I beg pardon, Lady Melanie," said Jack, "I beg a thousand pardons, but one cannot always restrain his feelings. I am perhaps the happiest man in the world, and that must be my only excuse — it is a good one?"

"Perfectly good," said Lady Melanie, "and I am sure dear Laura will accept it."

Whereupon Laura looked down and simpered, and Jack delighted accordingly.

"Well," said Jack, in a soft under-tone, taking Laura's hand, "I have not been de-

ceived in you,—your mother told me I should not be.”

“ No,” said Laura, “ I, — what can I say ? — I am but too happy.”

Whereupon John Batley, Esq., gave Laura another chaste salute.

“ Oh dear, Mr. Batley !” said Laura, “ you are really too good.”

“ Not I !” said Batley, jumping up, and twisting himself round in a pirouette ; “ this is but a momentary transport : I trust, Laura, dearest, we shall be the happiest of the happy.”

“ But,” said Laura, laughingly, “ you must not be so *very* civil to *me*. Mamma, I suppose, will not allow so much of your kindness to be bestowed upon *me*.”

“ Your Mamma,” said Jack, “ is the most amiable of her sex ; and in confiding to me the care of a treasure like *you*, convinces me, dearest Laura, of her just estimation of my unceasing desire to make you happy.

“ La !” said Miss Thurston, “ I never doubted it,—why should I ? I have no fear of being tyrannized over ;—no dread of your

temper, which I never saw ruffled, — no anticipation of scoldings,—not a bit of it. I am sure I can love you without one particle of fear mingling in the feeling to qualify its warmth.”

“Angel!” said Batley. “What a treasure you have given me, Lady Melanie, — to me, who have so recently lost the bright ornament of my house, my darling Helen.”

“I trust,” said Lady Melanie, “that all will be sunshine and smiles.”

“Can there be a doubt?” said Jack, throwing his well-disciplined eyes so as to bear full upon the not-particularly beautiful face of Laura.

—“And,” added her ladyship, “I do hope, since I have acceded to a proposition of the sort, which I really think ‘the world’ will agree in considering nothing unreasonable, that Laura will make herself extremely happy under the new arrangement, and that we may all live together.”

“Nothing can be more agreeable to *me*,” said Jack. “I see no difficulty,—not a bit: Laura and I can make it out with the greatest

satisfaction, and as for your living with *us*, nothing can be more comfortable."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Lady Melanie, "what a droll creature you are!—in fact, it is your fun that makes me delight in you. I suppose you would not suggest that Laura should altogether engross the management of our house.—No, my dear Mr. Batley, I assure you that nothing will give me greater satisfaction than proving to you how perfectly and entirely Laura shall be under your control."

"Nor will anything give me greater pleasure," said Laura, "than submitting myself most dutifully to so agreeable a father-in-law."

"Father-in-law!"—If Stonehenge had fallen upon his head all in a lump, Batley could not have been more completely smashed, squashed, annihilated, than he was by those words.—What did they mean?—what did Laura mean?—what did Lady Melanie mean? "Father-in-law!"—the word rang in his ears. What was next to be done?—what to be said?—what could he do?—what was the next move?

— “ You could not have a better,” said Lady Melanie.

“ I know that, dear Mamma,” replied Laura ;
“ and it will not require much trouble to be obedient to such a parent.”

“ ‘Gad,” said Jack, “ I — upon my life ! — eh ! — why — I — really — there seems — eh ! — I don’t know — I ” ——

“ Do not doubt my allegiance,” said Laura.
“ I do assure I will be as dutiful a daughter as if you were my own father, whom I scarce remember.”

“ Yes,” said Batley, “ but — the fact is — it is the most perplexing thing in the world ! — there is a mistake — a sort of — in fact — I never ” ——

“ No,” said Lady Melanie, “ there is no mistake. I always told you you would find her quite ready to join in my views upon this subject ; and that so far from any desire to thwart your plans or oppose your wishes, she would chime in directly with all your desires.”

“ Yes,” said Batley, “ but — really — this is — I — eh ! — I ” ——

“What is the matter?” said Lady Melanie. — “Have I mistaken you? — What upon earth do you mean by this conduct?”

“I mean,” said Jack, — “I mean nothing, — only that — my object — my view — my intention was, — by Jove I — you see — I meant — that is — yes — I meant to propose for Laura.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” screamed Laura, — “my poor dear Mamma! Why I, after all, am the object of Mr. Batley’s love and affection! Oh, what a horrid discovery! What *has* been the cause of all this *tracasserie*?”

“I really do not know,” said Batley, — “but the fact is as Miss Thurston states it. I admit the truth” —

“You *do*, Mr. Batley!” said Lady Melanie, firing up; — “come then, Laura, let us leave the gentleman to his own reflections. I only regret that compassion for his melancholy position, as he described it himself, induced me to listen to suggestions which I ought perhaps to have crushed in the outset; but when he ventures to outrage me by making proposals to my child, he puts himself in a situation only to

be treated with the contempt which invariably follows folly and presumption. Come, Laura."

Laura obeyed, and on leaving the room, turned round to Batley, and, holding up her finger, burst into a fit of subdued laughter, and said *sottô você*, "Oh, you vile deceiver!" The laugh resounded along the lobby after the door was closed, and Batley stood aghast like one exterminated.

It was quite clear that after this, Batley could not remain at Sadgrove; or at least that the Thurstons and he could not both continue their stay; and as it is an understood point, under such circumstances, that the ladies are to remain unmolested, and as if nothing had happened, it is equally clear that poor dear Batley must forthwith abscond — the which he did, leaving a note for Helen, stating that he was forced to start for town on particular business, and in such haste as not to be able even to take leave of her.

This note poor Helen, (who of course knew nothing of what had occurred about the Thurstons,) coupled with the absence of Mortimer

and Magnus, began to consider a sign of some horrid embrangement of her husband and father at Worcester, or whither they might, in point of fact, have gone ; and it may easily be imagined, that when she met her guests at dinner she was in no particularly good humour for conversation or mirth.

The long-nosed little Count St. Alme took the presidential seat, and the gay people sat down ; but there was a gloom and dulness pervading the scene, which, although natural under all the circumstances, everybody felt to be particularly painful, without comprehending exactly why it was so.

The sensitiveness of poor Batley was such, that he could not endure the thought of submitting the details of his discomfiture to Helen so shortly after his expressed certainty of conquest, nor trust to her turn for ridicule, the *rapport* of the curious mistake into which Lady Melanie — “ the figure-head of the Fury ” — had fallen ; and thus, in the flurry of the moment, he sacrificed his unhappy daughter’s peace of mind to a personal vanity, which, con-

sidering the relationship in which they stood to each other, he might upon such an occasion have moderated in her favour.

Ladies who are themselves charming, and who fancy that the men at table are not altogether disagreeable, feel no disinclination, especially in country-houses, to linger long before they “retire:” it is only your very modest, very foolish, or very vulgar person, who bestirs herself to get away from an intercourse which, in self-defence, every intellectual Englishwoman, for her own sake and for the sake of the male portion of her party, ought to prolong. In French society, the whole coterie rise together like a covey of partridges, and therefore it makes no great difference at what particular moment they go; but, with all our translations into English of foreign fashions, we shall be a long time before the national prejudice of sitting a little—not for any very long period—after dinner, subsequently to the departure of the bright stars of the firmament, is generally abandoned and abolished. We love to drink their healths when they are

gone; we love to talk of them and all about them: — and then “ Bull ” must have his politics—politics must be the topic, after the ladies are gone, in every circle where nothing about the real state of politics happens to be known. Why men and women should separate after dinner for any lengthened period, certainly requires a solution; but as English custom has, time out of mind, made it law, all we can say is, that the longer the mistress of the house stays at table after dinner, the more benefit she does to society, and the more rational amusement she and her lady friends enjoy.

English people get sociable only round a dinner-table, (and any dinner-table, except a round one, we presume, is rarely seen in these days.) Strangers who (if a man is weak enough to be in time to witness its miseries) seem, in that melancholy stage of purgatorial dulness, the quarter of an hour before dinner, absolute monsters, if they chance to be strangers, become by half-past eight o'clock generally endurable, — sometimes pleasant; and only

conceive, just as this sort of congenial feeling is coming over one, to catch the enquiring look of the lady of the house directed towards the leader of the throng, and see the whole bevy take their departure in long and melancholy array!

When you go to the drawing-rooms,—if you do,—the thing is all to be begun over again; it is a new field. Rely upon it, that nothing gives so much play to English society, high or low, as the aid of a dinner-table: it gets rid of an awkwardness with which the islanders are, more or less, universally affected; it puts them at their ease; and however cold and stiff the affair may be in the outset, it rarely happens but that before the dessert is put down, all is going well. The best proof of the truth of this axiom may be exhibited in the supposition of what the same twelve people—we mention twelve as an extreme number to be comfortable at a round table—would do, if it were possible to allow the said table suddenly to sink, like the cauldron of the Weird

Sisters, through the floor, and leave them sitting round the outside edge of the circle which it had just previously occupied.

It might, in some societies, be dangerous to perform this experiment too suddenly ; but done with due precaution, it would unquestionably produce on the *convives* a most extraordinary revolution of feeling.

On this particular day, Helen, who always protracted her stay at table whenever there were present those from whose high talent, or others from whose less abstruse but more available knowledge of the world, she felt she could derive either information or amusement, hastened her departure. She noticed that Lady Melanie, who had precedence, was fidgety, and anxious to get away, and that Laura looked "extremely odd," during a discussion which went on respecting the untoward departure of Batley ; and Helen, who had last seen her father intimately associated with them, began to suspect that they knew something of the cause of his sudden departure, and that it was in some manner connected with Mortimer's ab-

sence : all this again set her too active and imaginative mind wondering and weaving a web of mystery — and misery.

“ My dear child,” said the Countess St. Alme as they entered the drawing-room, “ you are worrying yourself to death about nothing. I know every turn of your thoughts ; you fancy something terrible is happening to Mortimer. Make up your mind to this sort of thing ; he will be home with his friend, long before we retire for the night.”

“ Yes,” said Helen, “ but it seems so strange that my father should have gone.”

“ Oh !” said Lady Melanie, “ don’t let that worry you.”

“ Oh, dear no !” said Laura, “ *that* needn’t trouble your mind. Ha, ha, ha !”

Whereupon Lady Mary something, who was a crony of Laura’s, re-echoed the laugh, which promised to be general but that, as Helen saw, it was immediately checked by the Countess.

This naturally set her wondering more. — What was the influence this presuming woman

possessed, to regulate the degree of mirth with which the visitors of Sadgrove chose to visit the sudden departure of her much-loved parent?

It was quite clear to Helen, that whatever had happened during the course of the day, everybody in the house was better informed as to the particulars than herself; and, certainly, if the sensation of being, as the phrase goes, "basketed," is never very agreeable, it must be doubly irksome and irritating when the "basketed" one, happens to be the mistress of the house in which the mystery exists.

The moment suspicion is allowed a place in the mind, "trifles light as air" contribute to strengthen and encrease its power; and although it differs in its character from jealousy, inasmuch as it arises from self-love and an apprehension of some plan or scheme against the "patient" himself, the progress of the disorder is not very dissimilar. The difficulty and delicacy of Lady Melanie's position in the family, outraged, as she felt she had been, by the bad taste of the father of her

hostess, and the offended vanity of her daughter, piqued at what *she* considered his presumption, and subdued only by a sense of what was due to "the lady of the house," kept them both in a state of artificiality throughout the evening. They spoke but little; and when they did speak, their answers were evasive; and there was a nervousness in their manner, which Helen, never glancing at a rejection of her agreeable parent's offer, still attributed to a knowledge of something that was to occur, — perhaps was occurring, perhaps had occurred, — in which they knew Mortimer was engaged; for even when the ladies laughed, and when they had, jocosely as they evidently meant, begged her to dismiss all apprehension from her mind, the whole performance was undoubtedly an effort.

It would be difficult to describe the anxiety of poor Helen. Vain were the assurances of the Countess that the absence of her husband was in no degree connected with the disappearance of her father; for although, of course, neither Lady Melanie nor her daughter had

dropped a hint of the *contretemps* of the morning, the Countess was not altogether uninformed of what had happened. The subtlety and activity of an accomplished French maid generally procured her all the secret intelligence connected with the society in which she mingled ; and upon the present occasion, although the particulars had not been so distinctly stated as they might have been, she was aware that an offer had been made and declined.

All these strangenesses and awkwardnesses went on : music was tried — it did not answer : the men joined the ladies, and one or two parties of *Ecarté* were formed ; but everything went on heavily until about eleven o'clock, when Mortimer, apparently in better spirits than usual, returned. Helen ran to receive him, and was not repulsed ; a kind of reproving look, however, seemed intended to moderate her enthusiasm ; and as his eye glanced round the room, Helen saw it first fall on Lady Melanie and her daughter, and then rest significantly upon the countenance of Madame St. Alme:

“Your father has left us, I find,” said Mortimer, again looking towards the Thurstons.

“How did you hear that?” said Helen.

“He was himself the herald of the news,” said Mortimer. “He was changing horses at ‘The Hop-Poles’ as we were going into the house; we therefore detained him, and now he and Magnus are gone up to town together.”

“What in the world took him away in such a hurry?” said Helen.

A look from Francis, in which gravity, admonition, and a sort of comic expression of mock melancholy, were blended, astonished Helen.

“He has special business in London,” said Mortimer with another frown, which unfortunately was perceived by Miss Thurston, who was thus made aware of what she could scarcely have doubted under the circumstances, — namely, that Batley had communicated the whole of the scene of the forenoon to his friends Mortimer and Magnus. The young lady looked at her mother, but her ladyship

affected to be too much engaged with her *Ecarté* to hear what was going on.

“Well,” said Mortimer, “and how have you made it out during my absence?”

“We rode in the morning,” said Miss Thurston.

— “And,” said Lord Harry, “I and Harvey went fishing. We had no sport, but a most beautiful excursion. The view of Sadgrove from the other side of the river is quite charming; and, by the way, your boat-keeper pointed out to us one of its beauties of which we have hitherto lived in a state of ignorance unblest.”

“What may that be?” said Mortimer.

“One of the prettiest things in the world,” said Lord Harry, — “a fishing-temple.”

These words, simple and innocent enough in themselves, produced a most extraordinary effect upon several of the company. Mortimer coloured-up, and his lip quivered, and his eye unconsciously sought that of the Countess, whose look, much to his surprise, as suddenly fell upon Helen.

“ Yes,” said Mortimer, “ it *was* a very pretty thing once, but it has got out of order.”

“ But does it belong to *you* ?” said Lady Mary.

“ Yes,” said Francis.

“ Then, Mr. Mortimer, we must go there,” said her ladyship, “ to-morrow ; — to-morrow, Mrs. Mortimer — have you never seen the Fishing-House ?”

“ No,” said Mortimer anticipating the answer, “ I did not wish her to see it until I had got it a little put to rights ; however, if to-morrow should be fine, we will send down our luncheon there, and go and bury ourselves in its sweet seclusion. I meant to surprise Helen, and to-morrow shall be the day.”

Accidentally, and by his own anxiety to account for his wife’s ignorance of this favoured spot, Mortimer had forced her into the very position in which no power on earth would have induced her to place herself. He had answered for her, that she had not seen it ; she knew she had : she knew that silence at that moment was falsehood, — and yet (not without a warn-

ing frown from the Countess) she had not the courage to admit that she had that very day been there. It would have exposed her to a scene, — to some outbreak of Mortimer's temper. The moment was past when she ought, if ever, to have said she *had* visited it; and now, what had she in view? — a struggle of falsehood and hypocrisy from that instant until the hour in which she first should see it with *him*.

“What do *you* say, Lady Melanie,” said Mortimer going to the *Ecarté* table, — “will to-morrow suit you?”

“Why, my dear Mr. Mortimer,” said Lady Melanie, “we *must* run away to-morrow. We have two or three visits to make, and——”

— “My dear Lady Melanie,” said Lord Harry, “going to leave us!”

“Oh, dear!” said Mrs Mortimer.

“Oh! really we must,” said Laura. “I know mamma is expected at the Dumbletons to-morrow.”

A look of Mortimer's at Helen was not lost upon the Countess.

“If you must,” said Mortimer, rather archly as Helen thought, “why there is an end; but we should be too happy if you would stay much, very much longer.”

“The more reason,” said Lady Mary, “for our going to the Fishing-House to-morrow: a change of scene will divert our thoughts from those who are gone.”

“Yes,” said Mortimer somewhat mournfully; and again Helen saw his look riveted on the Countess.

“Is it of any extent, Mortimer?” said Lord Harry.

“No,” replied Francis, “a mere summer-house: there are two or three rooms attached to it, and a kitchen, so you shall have your soup hot.”

“I am sure you will like it,” said the Countess to Helen, by way of effectually stopping what she fancied would be a declaration of their visit, ready to break from her lips.”

Helen said nothing, but shook her head mournfully and looked down.

“I am delighted,” said Mortimer, whose

spirits seemed better than usual, excited perhaps by some adventitious exhilaration, or by the ride, or — no matter what ; at all events he appeared to enter into the projected excursion with warmth and interest. Whether, when the morning came, he might repent of the readiness with which he had fallen in with the wishes of his friends, was another affair. That he was pointedly kind and affectionate in his manner to Helen was unquestionable ; and it seemed to the Countess, that even that effort to unbend was part of his preparation for the visit of the morrow. His knowledge of all Batley's proceedings, which he had confided to him, but of which he perceived by her manner Helen was ignorant, had created a new interest ; and when the party separated for the night, there was but one aching heart in the whole collection, — and that was Helen's.

The moment had passed when the natural impulse of her artless mind, in which there were no secrets concealed, would have led to the plain, straightforward, ingenuous admission, or rather declaration, that she had been

at this fishing-temple: it was impossible to recur to it; she was therefore, as we have just seen, destined to live on a feverish life through all the night and part of the following day; and when they retired to their room, and Francis gave her an animated description of her father's exploits and discomfiture, she listened without feeling absorbed in what else would naturally have awakened her warmest filial sympathies — the one sad thought still weighing upon her heart, that, trifling as the circumstance was, she had a concealment from her husband.

If such a person as Helen could have indulged in strong language, — and I am not sure but that, upon reasonable provocation, she might have done so, — it would be difficult to set down the terms in which she would have anathematized the fishing-temple, and the Countess who dragged her there. The night was one, to her, of horror and remorse: a thousand times she resolved to awaken Mortimer and tell him the truth, but as often was she checked by the fear of his anger, — a fear

instilled into her mind by the hints and innuendoes of her dangerous friend the Countess.

Generally speaking, where that unreserved communication exists between men and their wives, without which all hope of domestic happiness is vain, the time of retirement from the "million" is the season of confidence: to this period, on all former occasions, Helen had looked forward for what, in her lively way of treating subjects, she used to call a "talk over" of the people and the incidents of the day; and it must be owned that she had the faculty of hitting off characters with a quickness and truth which stamped her mind as one which was calculated for greater things than those which in all probability were destined to occupy it.

Different, indeed, was the feeling which actuated her during this night. While in her dressing-room, instead of speaking good-naturedly or kindly to her maid as was her wont, all her thoughts were devoted to what she felt was a wrong she had done. The questions of her attendant, as to the arrangements of her

dress for the morning, passed unnoticed ; and her manner was so strange and abstracted, that the poor *soubrette* began to fancy that she had done something to render herself obnoxious to her mistress's anger.

It was not so ; Helen was not angry with the maid, but with herself ; and the remorse she felt for what she had been induced, rather to permit than do, preyed upon her with accumulated force from the dread she entertained of Mortimer's alluding to the conversation which had passed in the drawing-room.

Luckily for her, Mortimer did not revert to the subject after they retired for the night, the real truth being, that it was one which he could not well approach without admitting that he himself *had* visited the scene of his former seclusion without his wife and with her visitor. Thus both of these two persons were kept in an agony of apprehension lest either of them should allude to what — if their conduct towards each other had been regulated by the candour which alone ensures mutual

happiness in married life — would have formed perhaps as innocent a topic of conversation as any upon which they might have chosen to discourse themselves to sleep.

Mortimer's feelings upon the point were of a totally different character from Helen's: in his anxiety to avoid the subject, there mingled recollections of crime and sorrow, and a consciousness of wilful deception towards his young bride — for the reader may be satisfied, that although the urbane and agreeable master of Sadgrove could not refuse to accede to the proposition of his guests to make a party to the Elysium which some of them had discovered, it had not been his intention, at all events so speedily, to familiarize Helen with its charms and beauties; and he lay trembling lest her questions about it might be such that he could not answer with a due regard to truth, without laying open more of his former habits, or of his reasons for not taking her there before, than he felt would be likely to encrease her affection or respect for him.

She, on the contrary, through the kind com-

municativeness of the Countess, was already apprised of all that he was most anxious to conceal from her; and that knowledge of past events, blended with the *secret* excursion of the morning, now evidently not to be revealed, made her miserable. Fortunately, however, owing to his expedition to Worcester, and the extra exhilaration of spirits, which we have before noticed, and which Helen, perhaps not injudiciously, attributed to the effects of wine, of which, ordinarily speaking, Mortimer never took more than ultra-dandy allowance; or perhaps, to the very anxiety of which we have spoken, Mortimer felt but little inclination to talk of anything, and fell into a profound sleep, after having enlightened Helen as to the real cause of her father's flight from the house, the colloquy terminating by her exclaiming—

“ Poor dear Pappy ! ”

The relief to her mind afforded by the certainty that Mortimer slept without reverting to the one dreaded subject, was great, — but she closed not her eyes; she lay thinking

and considering how she should best arrange the party for the morrow. If she went with *him*, she could not act sufficiently well, to affect surprise as the beauties of the place gradually broke in upon her ; and, if she were able to do so, she could not condescend to deny having been there before : no, — Francis should drive one of the ladies, — the Countess ? — perhaps not, — some one — any one, and she, Helen herself, would ride : thus mingled in the group of horsemen and horsewomen, the conversation would be general, and Francis should go on first in the phaeton and receive them ; and so deception was to follow deception, — for what ? — to humour a whim of the Countess, of whom Helen had become as much afraid *as her husband actually was*.

For one moment we may be permitted to enquire why, or under what circumstances, Mortimer ever sought to renew his acquaintance with that lady, or why he still endured an association with her, which evidently embittered his existence ; — there must be something in it more than we have yet discovered. He

has, we know, positively denied to his bosom friend, Magnus, the justice of his amiable sister's suspicions, or rather allegations, as to the nature and character of his early friendship for the lady for whose sake, it nevertheless appears, he has consented to relinquish that sister's friendship; for, although for some time after his return to Sadgrove, their correspondence continued, it had at the time of which we now speak ceased entirely. Time may perhaps enlighten us as to the real causes of Mortimer's conduct in this respect.

When morning, and breakfast came, Helen felt at ease. The preparations for the departure of the Thurstons, and the departure itself, would occupy the attention of the group until it was time to start on the expedition; and, now that the lady of the house was informed of the real cause of their evanishment, she saw at once the delicacy and propriety of their not longer remaining in the house of the daughter of the gentleman who, with all his dexterity and accomplishments, had made a shot so desperately bad, as to wound the vanity

of the elder lady of the two without so much as scratching the heart of the younger one. She was accordingly unremitting in her attentions and civilities; and, when Lady Melanie's travelling chariot drew up to the door, the whole population of visitors escorted her ladyship and her daughter to the steps of the chariot, and waved their hats and handkerchiefs in gay adieux, until the going guests were out of sight; — all these tokens of friendship and esteem being returned by similar signals from the carriage windows.

“What a bore that woman is?” said Lord Harry, as the party were returning *en masse* to the morning room; “I think the way she talks up her dear Laura is something beyond the common run of things.”

“Oh, and Laura's harp!” said Lady Mary; “upon my word, it is the most awful affair imaginable.”

“I must confess,” said Mortimer, “that the incessant harmony becomes after a day or two rather overpowering.”

“Yes,” said Lord Harry, “and if one ven-

tures to whisper even, the old lady looks daggers at the offender, while, as everybody knows, the only use of music is to give play and freedom to conversation."

"Somebody told *me*," said the Captain, "that Laura was going to be married."

"I doubt the fact," exclaimed Lady Mary: "first, I doubt there ever having been an offer; and, secondly, I doubt still more poor dear Laura's being able to say no if there had."

"Then," said the Countess, "you are mistaken."

"Well, Countess!" said Helen, "let us live in blissful ignorance; there *are* secrets in all families,—so—shall we think of making preparations for our departure?"

"If you please," said the Countess. "Pray, dear, did you read the description of the flower I talked to you about, in the 'Annual Register,' where there is a long account of it? I sent it by Hannam to your room."

"No," said Helen, "I have not had time to open the book, but I *will* when we come back from our trip."

“Now,” said the Countess, taking Helen aside, “be sure you do not betray by word or look the fact of your having visited the fishing cottage before. I know *his* temper; besides, you would involve me in a serious quarrel with him, for I know he never would forgive me for having taken you there, even if he overlooked your going with me.”

“Oh, Countess, Countess!” said Helen, “why *did* you take me there? why am I forced to play the hypocrite, when, if we had acted fairly, there could be no necessity whatever for deception? this sort of life will kill me.”

“In *this* world, dear,” said the Countess, “men of the world are to be met with their own weapons. Candour on one side is no match for duplicity on the other; however, don’t let us preach, but get ready.”

The laugh with which the Countess followed up this lively sally rang discordantly and inharmoniously in Helen’s ear. There are in the world countenances which, even in their playfulness, are demoniacal; and the smile which gleamed over this lady’s features was

characterized, at least as Helen thought, by a triumphant satisfaction at having, as if inadvertently, inflicted a fresh wound.

Helen hurried to her boudoir, from the door of which she met Mortimer issuing; he was pale and agitated, and his looks betrayed a violent agitation of mind which alarmed her.

“ Good Heaven, Francis !” said she, “ what is the matter ?—what *has* happened ?”

“ Nothing, nothing,” said he with a tremulous voice, and a look more of sorrow than of anger ; “ it is natural,—but cruel : would to Heaven I hadn’t known it !”

“ Known what ?” said Helen.

“ Here, here, Helen !” said Francis, “ come in, come in,—we are observed—they are looking up at us from the hall,—let us have no scene, for mercy’s sake !—I will go in with you.”

Saying which, he re-entered the boudoir; and Helen, fancying of course that he had discovered the history of her visit to the Fishing-House, threw herself into a chair as pale as death, or as her husband, for *he* looked like a spectre.

“Helen,” said he, labouring under deep emotion, which he strove earnestly to master,—
“Helen, you need not have let me see how anxiously you seek out my evil deeds,—how greedily you swallow all that can militate against my character.”

“Francis!” said Helen, “what do you mean?—what have I done to deserve this? If I have been inadvertently led to do that which is either painful or unpleasant to you, rely upon it, it has never been of my own free will. I wish to know nothing more than you think fit to trust me with; indeed, indeed I do not.”

“Then,” said Mortimer, “why take such unequivocal steps to bring to your mind the evidence of my guilt?”

“What on earth do you mean?” again said Helen, sobbing convulsively; “if I have erred, I ask your forgiveness.”

At this moment she had resolved, in spite of all the Countess’s persuasions and menaces, to confess the visit, and to state the truth, which nothing but Mortimer’s own singular interrup-

tion the night before, would have stifled ; for to falsehood Helen's proud heart would never have stooped.

“ Hear me ! ” said she.

“ Be calm, be calm ! ” said Mortimer ; “ I am not angry, but I am wounded, deeply wounded ; the sight of this book curdled my blood, — nay, Helen, He' re, Helen, it drove me mad. To think that from the whole library open to your use, you should have selected this one particular volume, stung me to the quick ; in it you see me degraded and debased, reviled and insulted : even if it gratified you to read such a record of my faults, you might surely have concealed the proof of your disposition that way, from my sight.”

“ Of what book are you speaking, Francis ? ” said Helen, relieved from her first apprehensions, but bewildered by the new allegation.

“ This book, Helen,” answered he, taking from the table the volume of the “ Annual Register ” which the Countess had sent by her maid to Helen as containing a paper on botany, treating particularly and minutely of a then

newly discovered flower, of which there were at the present time several varieties in her conservatory.

“ I have never opened it,” said Helen.

“ Why is it here ?” said Mortimer ; “ you know its contents ; you know that in its pages are printed and published to the world the particulars of that trial whence I came scathed and blasted in my reputation and character : there, in its pages, are recorded the savage philippics of the foul-mouthed highly-fee’d advocates paid to blacken my fame, and hold me up to hatred and contempt ; and this book is the single solitary one selected from thousands free for your special amusement and gratification !”

“ Oh, Francis, Francis !” sobbed Helen, “ think better of me : believe me—trust me—I repeat, and solemnly,—that I have never opened the book. The Countess sent it to me by her maid in order that I might read an account of a flower which”——

“ The Countess sent it you !” said Mortimer, his face flushing from deadly white to crimson ;

“ *she* sent it to you, and for the purpose of — not for the — eh ? ”——

“ For what I tell you, dearest,” said Helen.

“ Helen, Helen, my dearest girl ! ” said Mortimer, drawing her to his heart, “ I believe you. I see it — I see it all ; forgive me — forgive me, sweetest ! — The Countess sent it — Merciful Powers ! — say, Helen, — I am subject to these horrid fits of frenzy, — say, you forgive me.”

“ Forgive you, Francis ! ” said Helen ; “ what is there to forgive ? If I could have been guilty of such a meanness, if I could have harboured so base a feeling as that of which you thought me guilty, I should have deserved your bitterest curse : but no ; I have told you the truth.”

“ Of that I am sure, Helen,” said Mortimer, again pressing her to his heart : “ sure, you *have* no disguises from *me* ; why should you ? ”

Again the visit to the Fishing-House of yesterday, and the approaching one of to-day, flashed into her mind ; but now she dreaded to confess, lest her admission as to *that*, might

weaken his confidence in the truth of what she had now told him.

“It is, indeed,” said Helen, “a singular accident by which the Countess”——

“Accident !” said Mortimer : “Helen, rely upon it that nothing our friend the Countess does is done by accident ; she is a perfect woman of the world ; — do not offend her : say nothing about this ; read the paper to which she has pointed your attention, and send her back the book : I will trust you as to avoiding those pages a perusal of which can do no good, but which perhaps in the playfulness of her imagination she thought might do some mischief.”

Hearing Mortimer speak thus of the woman whom, in spite of herself, he had made her like, and whom he had selected as her first visitor at Sadgrove, the natural impulse of her heart would have been to have strengthened his avowed opinion of her motives by repeating all she had said of *him* to *her* ; but her father’s caution, added to that which Mortimer himself had given her not to offend her, kept Helen silent.

“That will be best,” said Francis, calmed down to reason by the conviction of his young wife’s ingenuousness and truth; “take no notice of what has passed.”

“Take you the book, Francis,” said Helen; “carry it away, — take it out of my sight!”

“No, no,” said Mortimer, “I must not appear in the affair: *you* return it when you have read what she means you to read; or rather when you have not read what she really means you to read, but that which she *says* she means you to read. Come, Helen dear; these people are waiting for us: your eyes look red; do not come down till all traces of this sorrow are gone: I will keep them engaged till you are ready. You *do* forgive me, Helen?” added he.

“From my heart and soul!” exclaimed Helen with a warmth so genuine and sincere that Mortimer’s heart beat with pleasure and satisfaction that he was blessed with such an amiable and excellent wife.

He went down into the hall, and Helen rang for her maid; but, the more she thought of the

brief storm just passed, the more she wondered at the influence which the Countess evidently possessed over Francis. That he knew her faults and vices, as Helen held them, it was evident ; for he spoke of her conduct even in the very last affair as being full of design and duplicity,—“rely upon it, Helen, nothing ever happens with the Countess by accident.”

Helen was dressed, her habit was on ; her fine countenance was filled with an expression somewhat more thoughtful than usual, but not the less beautiful for that. But, she descended the staircase with an air of ease, *selon l'usage du monde*, and by the time she had reached the bottom, the sunshine of her eyes resumed its brightness, and for the “world’s” sake Helen looked the happiest creature on earth.

While the arrangements were making for the departure of the merry party, Helen watched Mortimer’s movements with a degree of interest and curiosity which perhaps she had never before felt upon the opening of any similar excursion. Her dress proclaimed her intention

of riding, for in this part of her design of avoiding a protracted piece of acting she persisted.

“What!” said Mortimer, as gaily as he could, “you are for riding, Helen? Who then goes with me in the phaeton?”

There was a brief pause, it was *but* brief; all the ladies were prepared for riding, except the Countess: “I suppose, my dear Countess, I am to have the happiness of your society?” said Mortimer.

The Countess gave a look of acquiescence, and said, “If I do not bore you.”

“Not particularly,” said Mortimer, with a look so full of kindness and regard that Helen shuddered as she saw it given; not because she was jealous; not because she wished to restrain the friendly feelings of her husband, or check their expression; but because the look itself, and the manner in which it was given and received, were all so totally at variance with the feelings Mortimer had so recently expressed with regard to the Countess. To be sure, his civility might be offered upon the principle

which he strove to impress upon his wife, of not offending her. However, Helen determined *not* to think, but to be as gay as she could upon this, to her, important morning, made, in fact, important by a series of incidents in themselves of no importance whatever. Important, however, it eventually proved; and from its termination may be dated much of that through which the reader has to penetrate before he arrives at the final point of our narrative.

Lest, however, we should hurry him, or her, as the case may be, too rapidly to the *Ultima Thule* — the catastrophe — we will take the opportunity, while all these very gay and happy personages are tittuping along upon their sleek-skinned horses to the Paradise of Sadgrove, just to cast a look towards London, covered as it is with its brown blanket of atmosphere, which, at ten miles' distance, points it out as the region of sea-coal, if not, as generally said, of sin.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Batley encountered Mortimer at Worcester, his first intention—worldly—was not to say one syllable as to the real cause of his sudden flight from Sadgrove; but Mortimer and Magnus led him on to a full confession of the facts of the case, he being never the wiser as to what carried them to that city; for, however assiduous *they* were in finding out *his* little involvements and worries, they remained upon their own business as silent as Gog and Magog during the animated discussions which occasionally take place in the Guildhall of the City of London.

Whatever *had* been the occupation of the morning on which those two worthies, Mortimer and Magnus, had busied themselves, nothing transpired except the result, which was

a resolution on the part of Magnus to start for London forthwith: that this had been either premeditated or reasonably anticipated, it was not difficult to discover, from the fact that Magnus's carriage had been sent to Worcester from Sadgrove with his servant in the morning under the pretence that, if the night should turn out wet, or they should be kept later than they intended, it would be so comfortable to have it there; a precaution rendered, however, somewhat suspicious by the fact that the imperial was filled with the gallant Colonel's clothes, while his dressing-case, pistol-case, writing-desk, and half a score packages of travelling comforts, were all stowed away within.

There was a mystery in all this, as indeed there seemed to be in everything connected with the family: nevertheless, Jack Batley, who was the readiest of men at availing himself of anything that was going, either for amusement or advantage, found his account in the proceeding; and therefore, although he might be supposed to be interested in what looked like a decisive movement on the part

of the most intimate friend of his son-in-law, he asked no questions, but answered one which was put to him by Magnus, whether he should prefer a corner in his carriage to a hack chaise by himself; for as Batley had gone down to Sadgrove in Lady Melanie's roomy chariot, he had no conveyance at hand but a "yellow and two," or the stage-coach, in which he would most probably have deposited himself in the morning, if he had not fallen in with his son-in-law and his friend in the afternoon.

It is scarcely worth while to detail the conversation which the triumvirate enjoyed at "The Poles," as the house, in its own vicinage, is called: it is merely necessary to observe that Batley opened his whole heart to his companions; and that the three being, to a certain extent, elevated by a long sitting over tavern wine after an early dinner, he swore a great oath,—not profanely, for it was by some heathen god or goddess, no matter which,—that he would revenge himself upon the Thurstons by marrying the first pretty girl he could find in the humour to accept him; rich or poor, it

should make no difference to him; if he did *not*, he should feel himself dishonoured and disgraced: and in this extremely sapient resolution this long-headed politician was greatly supported by his son-in-law and his son-in-law's friend, who, although he did not say much, observed that nothing could so completely obliterate the effect of a defeat as the speedy occurrence of a victory.

In this strain the three gentlemen continued to argue, until Magnus's carriage driving into the gateway according to order, he and Jack threw themselves into it, resolving to go to Oxford that evening; unless, tempted by the quiet and unassuming comforts of "The White Hart" at Chipping-Norton, they might be induced to sleep in that calm and peaceable town, of which horse-cloths are the staple commodity.

Whether this happened, or whether they reposed at "The Star," in other days a bright one,—or at "The Angel," now in great feather,—seems immaterial; the certainty is, that they arrived in town the following after-

noon, heartily sick of each other, — Magnus bored to death by the fluency of Batley, and Batley equally worn out by the pomposity of Magnus. They parted friends, which was something; and Jack, in spite of all his former repulses, — such is the instinctive force of nature, — resolved to go in the morning and tell his tale of sorrow to brother Jacob, certain in his own mind, however, of the sort of reception which he should meet with.

Jack went about his house a melancholy, miserable man; he looked at the empty rooms, dingy with London dust and smoke, and redolent of the indescribable vapour, if it may so be called, for which there can be found no suitable word except one, which is not inserted in any English dictionary, — *frowst*. It is peculiar to our great metropolis, and is produced upon furniture and in rooms by the eternal and incessant depositings of minute particles of filth upon every object exposed to the operation of what is usually called “the air,” and which is in itself a wonderful combination of filth, smoke, fog, gas, and various

other results derived from gutters, kennels, decaying vegetables, putrid meat, the chimneys of glass-houses, distilleries, brewhouses, melting-houses, boiling-houses, &c. &c. &c., which in combination constitute that pea-soup atmosphere of which already notice has been taken, and in which a certain million or so of people contrive to exist nevertheless and notwithstanding.

Batley's house had been shut up to exclude all this horror ; the remedy was worse than the disease : and, after having breathed the pure air of Worcestershire for a few days, the smell of soot, carpets, and canvass-bags, all equally "frowsty," sickened his stomach, while the desolate appearance of the rooms themselves pained his heart. Jack, however, belonged to two or three clubs ; and having decided that "The University" was the best for dinners, thither he repaired, meaning to pass the evening in "reading-up" the newspapers for the two days he had lost by leaving Sadgrove in the preceding forenoon.

Amongst the grievances of clubs are, as in

every other place in society, bores ; but no bores are so serious or so inevitable as club bores. To a man much in the world as Batley was, the hope and comfort of dining at a club is, that one may be left entirely to his own solitary cutlet and pint of wine, either, as Batley proposed to do, to read-up newspapers after a day or two's absence from town, or to think over matters peculiarly interesting to oneself.

No man, we presume, who has a house of his own and a tolerably large circle of acquaintance, dines at a club, except as a matter of convenience,—always excepting House-dinners and trials of skill in gastronomy. It should, therefore, be held, if he sit down to dine alone, that his object is to *be* alone,—to dine, and to go wherever his business or pleasure calls him ; and no man should take the deciding step of inviting himself to dine with him, unasked, any more than he would in his own house. If the originally planted diner, begins the colloquy by an invitation to the next arrival, what can be better or more agreeable ? but, as it appeared to Jack, the most active self-bidders,

—the chair-placing offenders of themselves to the unhappy *solitaire* who desired of all things to dine alone, — were uniformly the greatest bores of the whole community.

“ If,” said Jack to himself upon the occasion to which we now refer, “ the rule in clubs were, that men should hold the little table at which one dines sacred, and that, until they were asked, they would not ‘ make one ’ at it, all would be well : in all other respects this club-house is my house in common with others ; but my little table is as much mine, individually and exclusively, as my larger table in Grosvenor Street. To-day I like to dine alone ; I am not in the humour to talk, or laugh, or drink, or eat, — and here I am by myself. If I want a companion, there are plenty to join me ; but till *I* say, ‘ Won’t you sit down ? ’ — ‘ Won’t you come and dine here ? ’ or use some such provocative, I do expect to find myself as much alone as if I were in my own dinner-parlour with the house-door intervening between me and the street.”

“ How do you do, Mr. Batley ? ” said a most

respectable Fellow of Ma'dalene, drawing his chair to the table where the repulsed Lothario was sitting.

"How do you do, Doctor?" said Batley.

"Pray," said the Doctor, "have you heard anything lately of poor Dick Dowbiggen?"—and then, turning away without waiting for an answer, added, "Waiter, bring my glass of negus *here*."

Batley wished him in — his college, at least.

"No," said Jack, "I haven't heard of him for some time."

"He's going," said the Doctor, "very fast; gout,—asthma,—and a touch of erysipelas:—why, you know, Batley, we can't last for ever. He must be about your standing, I think."

"My standing!" said Batley, and all his hopes of matrimony rushed into his mind; "he is *my* senior by twenty years, Doctor."

"Oh! perhaps so," said Dr. Bottomly; "I may mistake;—but you were both at Ma'dalene together."

"Ah!" said Batley, "but he was at least

old enough to be my father. Why, he was a fellow when I was an under-graduate."

"Probably," said Dr. Bottomly ; " but you were always old-looking of your age."

To Batley, with the curly wig, the uncommon stock, the extraordinary waistcoat, and the sort of coat he wore, this was a hateful observation.

" Waiter," said Jack, " my bill !"

" Are you going?" said the Doctor.

" Yes," said Jack ; " I have an engagement at ten, and it wants only a quarter. I thought you were going yourself."

" No," said the Doctor, " no: I purposed having half an hour's chat with you about old times over my negus."

" I don't care much about old times," said Batley ; " I always keep looking forward, Doctor."

And then Batley went off in a strain which quite astonished the venerable fellow, and led him to suspect that his companion was not altogether in the possession of his right senses ; after which exhibition of principles and opi-

nions, he disbursed his four shillings and sixpence for his cutlet and pint of sherry, and took leave of the snug corner in which he had ensconced himself to be quiet, but out of which he had been driven by the extraordinary good-nature and attention of his reverend and venerated friend.

Jack quitted the little club-house, the *beau-idéal* of prettiness, (in spite of its marble window-shutters and the equivocal door in the centre of its stair-case,) and scarcely could muster courage to go directly home; — and yet Crockford's was empty, and Brookes's torpid. — What was he to do?

What he did, — whether he went into the Haymarket play, or recreated himself in any other pursuit, — makes no difference to the reader, as far as our history is concerned: all he needs to know is, that at some period of the night he found himself with his head upon his pillow in his bed-room in Grosvenor Street, resolved to visit his brother Jacob in Lilypot Lane early the following day.

According to this predetermination, Jack

had no sooner despatched the ordinary business of his morning than he betook himself to the city in order to consult Jacob; a course he the more confidently adopted, inasmuch as not intending upon that occasion to ask for anything but that which every man, probably conscious of its value, is extremely liberal in giving,—namely, his advice,—he thought he might meet with a somewhat more fraternal reception than he could have anticipated if he had been going on one of those numerous errands which had so frequently proved unsuccessful.

In undertaking this expedition, Jack thought proper to take the precaution which sundry Magnates of the West-end of the town are in the habit of adopting when they are forced to visit the dark dens and dungeons, filled with desks and drudges, in the obscurity of which are made the profits on which they disport and display themselves in what they call their proper sphere of society, and accordingly ensconced himself in a hackney-coach; and, having directed the driver to stop at the corner of Lilypot Lane, he hastily drew up the cracked

glass of the crazy vehicle, and, throwing himself into one of its corners, began to arrange in his mind the materials for a dialogue with his eccentric relation.

Arrived at his destination, the excited Batley hurried to his brother's counting-house. King Charles on his steed at Charing-Cross, or King James on his pedestal in Privy Gardens, were not more certain fixtures than Jacob at his desk in Lilypot Lane, from nine in the morning until 'Change-time; except on Sundays or holidays, when he indulged himself in a walk to the "West-end," as he quaintly called it, or when any special business required his personal attention in those parts.

Upon the day in question there he was, poring over huge books, and files of letters, with as much earnestness and assiduity as if he were just beginning business, and had a host of ravenous relations to provide for after his death, instead of possessing one only traceable connexion in the person of his brother.

"Jacob," said John, pushing open the swing-door of the sanctum, "how d'ye do?"

“ John,” said Jacob, looking up from his papers, and instinctively shutting the drawer of the table in which lay his cheque-book, “ how d’ye do, John? — eh! — what d’ye want?”

“ Nothing,” replied John, “ but half-an-hour’s talk with you.”

“ Oh, that’s all,” said Jacob; “ I can’t spare half-an-hour now.”

“ Well,” asked John, “ when can I have that pleasure?”

“ Any time after four,” said Jacob.

“ Where do you dine?” asked the affectionate brother.

“ At ‘ The Horn.’ ”

“ May I join you?” said Jack.

“ If you choose,” said Jacob, “ share and share alike; only the dinner won’t suit *you*, I dare say, nor the hour — half-past four punctual: bit of fish plain boiled, and a rump-steak.”

“ Nothing I should delight in more,” said Jack.

“ Very well,” said Jacob; “ call in here at

ten minutes after four, and we'll go together, else I suppose you'll not be able to find your way."

"I will be punctual," said John; "but you don't enquire after Helen."

"I am afraid to ask," said Jacob; "I know what the answer *will* be some day, and, though it don't make any personal difference to *me*, anything wrong *there* might hurt my credit."

"Oh, there is nothing wrong, I assure you," said Jack; "Helen is well, and I trust as happy as she ought to be."

"Ah, that'll do," said Jacob; "now go, there's a good fellow; be punctual, for I shan't wait: and—here—Mr. Grub!"

"I am off," said Jack; "rely upon my being here to the minute."

"Umph!" muttered Jacob to himself, as he replaced his spectacles on his nose; "something in the wind—no man in this world does anything without a motive: why should he take a fancy to a four-o'clock chop if he didn't expect to get something by it?—Here, Mr. Grub!"

The faithful Grub stood at his side, and again the prudent Jacob fell to business.

John, having looked at his watch, began to calculate how he could contrive to kill the two hours and a half he had before him, a very little consideration assured him that there were plenty of modes in which that desirable operation might be performed. His first descent was upon the Tower, where two or three of his friends of the Guards were quartered ; here, however, to use his own expression, he missed his tip, for those whom he knew best, and with whom he meant to have taken luncheon, were, what they call, “ gone to Town.” Thence, therefore, he bent his steps to the Custom-house Quay, as one of the liveliest, and, to a speculative eye, one of the most interesting localities of the metropolis. Leaving this busy scene, he permitted himself to be jostled westward until he reached St. Paul’s, just as the afternoon service was beginning : having gratified his passion for church music in the choir, he lingered amongst the fast increasing monuments of the cathedral until it was nearly

time for him to retrace his steps to Lilypot Lane.

“Punctual!” said Jack, as he again made his appearance.

“Every man is punctual,” said Jacob, “when he wants anything.”

“I assure you,” said John, “I want nothing to-day but your society, and perhaps a little of your advice.”

“Advice!” said Jacob, “I never take advice; I’m not very likely to give it: however, if I do, it must be after I have dined: I hate conversation at dinner; I like to be jolly and have no talking. —Come, Mr. Grub! call Alexander to help me on with my great-coat; good folks are scarce, and the evenings in October sometimes set in sharpish. —D’ye hear?”

“Let *me* do it?” said Jack, suiting his action to the words.

“No,” said Jacob, “I pay Alexander for waiting on me: I know what it costs—and no favour: I hate to be beholden to anybody.”

Accordingly, Alexander, or, as he was called by Mr. Grub, Alick, performed the operation

of great-coating his master, and, having first carefully smoothed it down, presented him his hat; a quarter of an hour being nearly expended in preparing the merchant against the probable severity of the evening of a bright sunshiny day.

“ Now then,” said the worthy man, “ if you are not too fine to be seen walking with me, here I am, ready and willing, and as hungry as a hunter; so come.—Alick ! I shall be in by ten; and, if anything particular comes, I shall be down at the old shop.”

Alick bowed obedience, and the brothers sallied forth.

“ You never were at ‘The Horn’?” said Jacob.

“ No,” was the reply.

“ I can’t think what carries you there to-day,” said Jacob.

“ I have told you,” said John: “ I haven’t seen you for some time, and I wish to have some talk with you.”

“ Ah !” said Jacob, “ all your fine birds are flown, so now you can condescend to join me.

When are you to be married? not that I care: I only ask."

"Why," said Jack, "it is upon that point I"—

"Oh, ah," interrupted the worthy citizen, "I thought it was something of that sort; why, is the matter with Miss—what's her name you told me all about?—is that off?"

"That is just what I wish to explain," said Jack.

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Jacob, "what a fellow you are—always finding mares' nests!—I have heard people say of a mad speculator that all his geese were swans; but, as for you, it's quite the reverse, — all your swans turn out to be geese."

"Why, there *has* been a little mistake," said Jack, obliged to bawl out his confidential communication in a voice of thunder to out-roar the noise of the carts, coaches, and all the other conveyances with which the streets were thronged.

"Mistake!" exclaimed his brother, "ha,

ha! I never make mistakes; nobody need make mistakes, if they will but take a little trouble: I never pity anybody who makes a mistake. Here, turn to the left; there, keep this side!"

And accordingly the relations diverged into Paul's Chain, and, descending towards the river, just as they had passed the end of Knight-Rider Street, Jacob called a "halt" to John, who was in advance; and at the moment found himself at the door of a tavern affording in external appearance little in the way of inducement to enter it, but which, nevertheless, was the chosen *restaurant* of his wealthy brother.

"Is *this* the place?" said John, evidently surprised at Jacob's selection.

"It is," said Jacob, "and a deuced good place too: there, go in; push open the green-baize door — there. — I hope they have got a bit of fire, — October afternoons are chilly, eh? — they *have*, by Jingo! that's right: — all done for *me*; other people think it too hot, but what

do I care for *that*? Well, well done, Thomas!— nice fire, eh? — dinner ready?”

“ In two minutes, sir,” said the waiter, placing a chair for John on one side of the table, standing in the corner between the window and the fire-place, Jacob’s seat being opposite and against the wall.

The look of dismay which overspread John’s countenance as he entered the small and somewhat dark apartment, relaxed into a more complacent expression as his eye glanced over the snowy whiteness of the table-cloth, the shining cleanliness of the plate, and the comfortable appearance of the arrangement altogether.

As the reader is already apprised of Mr. Jacob Batley’s aversion from conversation at dinner, we will pass over the history of the meal summarily: there was salmon *au naturel*, a broiled fowl with mushroom sauce, and a rump-steak; the sherry was good, the cooking good, to the full extent of its pretensions: and when Jack, who did not think it right in the “world” to drink port-wine, tasted one

glass of Mr. L.'s favourite vintage, he sipped and sipped again, waiting for an opportunity to begin his interesting conversation with his brother until the four or five other diners had taken their departure, seeing that the coffee-room was too small to admit of any confidential intercourse without the certainty of being overheard.

The few visitors, however, were there habitually, and Jacob knew them all, and they all knew Jacob; and John Batley grew gradually to like them, inasmuch as each of these men, for whose intellect he began by having no respect, and for whose station he had no regard, exhibited in the course of the conversation which occurred after dinner, and which, from the circumscribed size of the apartment and the acquaintance of the parties became general, each after his own fashion and in his own particular line, knowledge and information which quite astonished the merely theoretical man of public business. Here, in this small unpretending room, was he associated with men whose innate talent and industry

had honourably realized for themselves thousands upon thousands; and who were, each in his way, masters of subjects of which Batley had learned only to think superficially, and talk unknowingly, and he at last worked himself into the faith that there might be not only wealth and enterprise eastward of Temple Bar, but that there might be knowledge, and wisdom, and high gentlemanly feeling, stored in the darkest recesses of Lilypot Lane and Watling Street; added to all which, he admitted to himself there might be comfort at "The Horn" tavern, although the introduction of cigars after dinner (he being without a flowing robe to shield his clothes from the contaminating odour of the tobacco, or a "Grecian cap" to shelter his *own* hair from the influence of the smoke,) certainly staggered him. However, "nobody" was in town, and therefore "nobody" would be annoyed upon his return to his own proper sphere; and as he found Jacob in a good humour, he determined not to be betrayed into a bad one, upon the occasion of having, for the first time in

his life, beheld his brother in a position in which he was looked to as somebody of importance by persons who, never expecting any favour or affection from him, did not care for, even if they saw through, the selfishness of his character and disposition, but who paid that regard to assiduity and industry crowned by success, which, in a great mercantile community, cannot fail to command attention and respect.

By nine o'clock the rest of the company had quitted the room, and John having in an "unworldly" manner suggested another bottle of port, Jacob objected point-blank thereunto, and proposed a glass of punch "in lieu thereof," to which proposition John, the younger brother, the *verd antique*, immediately assented, and drawing his chair towards the end of the table, and consequently nearer his relative and the fire, accordingly made preparations for opening his subject.

Thomas the waiter, who had never seen John Batley, and did not know in what degree of relationship he stood to the "constant customer of the house," felt an unaccountable

jealousy of the ease and familiarity with which he thus placed himself in juxta-position with Jacob. An elderly gentleman, known to be rich, is uniformly surrounded by a certain *clique* of expectants : they call on him in the mornings ; they dine with him in the afternoons ; they sit with him in the evenings ; they do all his little biddings,—go of errands for him, buy him little sixpenny presents, affect the greatest assiduity in his service, shut doors that are left open behind him, pull down blinds that are left up before him, stir the fire for him, write letters for him, and, in short, fetch, carry, fawn, and cringe, like so many daggled-eared spaniels. Thomas the waiter was not, of course, admitted to a degree of familiarity which could entitle him to such gentlemanly subserviency ; but Thomas had a notion that Jacob would leave him something “very considerable” when he died, and therefore it was, that Jacob’s fish was better in itself and better dressed, and Jacob’s rump-steak tenderer and more carefully cooked, than those of any other frequenter of “The Horn.” This feeling was nursed and cuddled-up in the mind

of the respectable attendant, and nothing, therefore, could annoy him more than the sight of a stranger to *him*, taking, as he considered, such extraordinary liberties with Mr. Jacob Batley, except, indeed, the extremely urbane and placid manner in which Mr. Jacob Batley seemed to admit them upon this special occasion. Nothing is more diverting than this sort of irritable anxiety upon such points; as if the rich man, in his senses, does not duly appreciate the fulsome attentions that are paid him by people who care nothing in the world for what he is, but for what he has, to the attempted exclusion of those who really love and respect him, but who abstain from forcing themselves upon his kindness or intruding themselves upon his hospitality: — not that either of these two last attributes could with any degree of truth be made applicable to Jacob.

“Well,” said John, when the company was gone, the green-baize doors shut, and the punch on the table, “I have something to say, brother, which I want you to hear.”

“ Oh !” said Jacob, “ about the mistake and the marriage ?”

“ Exactly so,” said John ; “ the story is brief, and you shall have it.”

And so he had ; but as we have been at Sadgrove, where Jacob had not been, and, as far as probability goes, is never likely to be, it shall not be repeated here : the blunder was a strange one—the result, as we know, decisive.

“ Well,” said Jacob, “ I never heard such a thing in my life. I know nothing about female hearts, and all the stuff you talk about ; but how the deuce you could go on with your fine talk to one woman—ha, ha, ha ! and make the other—ha, ha ! If I had done that !—no matter—no. I don’t know anything about it, — and don’t care ; but *you*”——

“ Don’t laugh at me !” said Jack ; “ for, whatever else I can endure, I can’t bear ridicule. I feel conscious that I have made myself absurd, and that ‘ the world ’ next season will have the whole story, and I sha’n’t be able to show my face. There is but one course ; nothing can save me but marrying

somebody else — *coute qui coute* : upon *that* I am resolved, or I perish. A lady, and with money ;—if little, something,—if much, more.”

“ Umph !” said Jacob, stirring his punch with his spoon, and then sipping ; “ that doesn’t seem so unreasonable : on the contrary, if you are afraid of being laughed at by what you call ‘ the world ’—of St. George’s, Hanover Square, and the surrounding streets,—I think that is the best plan : but it’s all ticklish work ; to have anybody to care about, must be an infernal bore — eh ? — and the quarrels and squabbles — eh ? ”

“ That would be *my* affair,” said Jack ; “ but I never shall forget the hyæna-like laugh of that Laura Thurston, who, I give you my word, *was*, or at least seemed to be, as fond of me as ever woman of thirty could be of ”——

“ Thirty, was she ? ” said Jacob.

“ I should think little less,” replied John.

—“ And not married—eh ? —why, for what reason, with *her* fortune ? ” said Jacob.

“ I don’t know,” said John, “ except that she is deep blue.”

“ Oh !” said Jacob. “ Ah, well, that *is* something ; but, however, in course she is altogether out of the question now — eh ?”

“ Quite entirely,” said Jack.

“ Why,” said Jacob, sipping his delightful beverage, “ if you really have resolved upon marrying again, — and now it seems a matter of spite ”——

“ Yes, I confess, more pique than passion,” said Jack.

—“ Why not,” said Jacob meditatively, — “ why not turn your thoughts towards Mrs. Catling, that very pretty widow who dined once or twice with Helen and you in Grosvenor Street ; and who is — why, I cannot say, — so very much delighted with *you* ? ”

“ What ! that pretty creature,” said John, “ with those bright blue eyes and that lovely fair hair, up in the Regent’s Park ? ”

“ Don’t talk so loud,” said Jacob, “ waiters always listen ; and, as what you are praising so much, is not altogether in my regular line of business, it might do me harm if it were overheard : but,” added he, leaning over his

tumbler to speak confidently to John, "she is — you may rely upon it."

"She certainly is very handsome," said Jack, "and extremely lady-like. Her late husband was your greatest friend, — that's something; and she is of a good family, — and that's something more."

"Good family!" said Jacob, "if you will only step over to Bennett's Hill, not twenty yards from this door, the Heralds will give you such a history of her as will make your hair stand on end: — she is one of the two last of the noble race of Fitz-Flanneries of Mount Flannery, in Monaghanshire — quite the gentlewoman; — and as for what you call accomplishments, — she draws like a cart-horse, and sings like a tea-kettle, as the man says in the book."

"Now don't joke, brother," said Jack. "I remember thinking her extremely agreeable; — and — you see it would be such a triumph to marry off-hand after this contemptuous rejection, — and a handsome woman with property, too."

“Property!” said Jacob; “her late husband, Kit Catling, who made mints of money by madder, died of dropsy just eighteen months ago, and left me trustee, sole executor, and residuary legatee,—all, everything in my own hands,—more fool he!—but that’s nothing. I didn’t care a straw for *him*, — but so it is; it is of no use caring for anybody, it never does any good. His will, like his wife’s pedigree, is within a hundred yards of us — Prerogative Office, just round the corner; — arms one side, leg’s t’other — eh? — there’s a joke for you! Convenient neighbourhood — what? — I think she would be a capital match for you. I know, as I have told you, she likes you; I know she wants to be married; and I know she likes what you call, and what she considers, ‘the world.’”

“Has she a jointure or ——?” said Jack.

“Jointure!” replied Jacob; “seven hundred and fifty pounds per annum of her own for life, let her marry when she pleases; all snug — requires nothing on your part — pleasant addition to your income. Give her two hundred a year of her own cash by way of

pin-money, and let her have the balance back again for jointure if she survives you : I can manage all that."

" Upon my life ! brother, this sounds well," said John.

" I think so, too," said Jacob.—" Thomas !"— (Thomas came.) — " Ditto punch."

Thomas " understood the call," and as speedily as possible re-appeared with two more glasses of " the same," which in Jacob's facetious manner he called " warming it up again."

" Well," said Jacob, apparently taking much greater interest in John's affairs than usual,—which John naturally attributed to the influence of the " drink," and which, moreover, made him deeply repent that he had not at an earlier period of his life more readily fallen in with the habits of his eccentric relative, whose liberality appeared to him to possess, in a great degree, the mercurial quality of expanding in proportion to the warmth of the atmosphere by which it was surrounded, — " well, now really—I am serious—I think Mrs. Kit Catling would suit uncommon well ; you would,

as I have said, have your life-interest in her seven hundred and fifty—short the pin-money.”

“ I recollect admiring her very much,” said John, warming with the subject.

“ She is a charming woman,” said Jacob : ‘ you ’ll be a happy man if you get her.’ ”

—“ And you think there is a prepossession ? ” said John.

“ She has told me as much,” said Jacob ; “ but, as I never meddle nor make in matters of that kind, I didn’t take the trouble to say anything about it : it is nothing to *me*, you know ; however, I tell you my mind.”

“ And I thank you sincerely,” said John.

—“ And I tell you what,” added Jacob, evidently excited by his potation, “ I ’ll do something for you unasked, — and I do it, Jack, because you didn’t come to see me to-day, merely because you wanted something, — I ’ll stump you down a thousand pounds the day you get her consent, just to give you a start. It is not for *your* sake so much as to show those women, the Thirstys,—what d’ye call ’em ? — people of ‘ the world,’ which I hate, —

friends of Mortimer — eh? — that we can do without 'em: so, there's my hand, and a thousand pounds in it when Widow Catling says 'yes' to the bargain."

"My dear Jacob," said John,—for, for almost the first time in his later life he had called him by his Christian name,—“how can I sufficiently thank you! I am resolved—her seven hundred and fifty pounds a-year added to my income will do all we want:—you are sure she has *that*?”

“I tell you I am sole executor,” said Jacob, “trustee, residuary legatee, and everything else, under the will. I told Kit that I wouldn't have anything to do with it if I hadn't it all my own way:—no colleagues for me!”

“Then,” said John, “the sooner this is concluded the better, and a thousand thanks to you for your kindness!”

“A thousand pounds, you mean,” said Jacob:—“and now let us have our bill, and go. Walk home with me and we will talk this matter over further, and to-morrow set to work about it.”

“ Waiter !” said John, “ bring the bill.”

“ Put it all to my account,” said Jacob.

“ No my dear brother, I —” said John.

“ Will you allow me to do as I please ?” replied Jacob ; “ it is *my* bill — you understand, Thomas.”

“ Yes, sir,” said Thomas, and walked away admiring the extraordinary liberality of the millionaire in not making his brother pay some seven shillings and ninepence three-farthings as his share of “ the reckoning.”

The brothers then left “ The Horn,” and Jack was too delighted to accompany Jacob to Lilypot Lane, astounded at his warmth, and liberality reaching in its expanse from seven shillings and ninepence three-farthings to a thousand pounds ; but as they walked, so the more earnestly did Jacob confirm his resolution as to the liberal gift of the latter sum, and the more fervently did John resolve to carry into effect the proposal which should ensure it.

Now, as to the facts of the case : — The Mrs. Catling in question was, as both brothers agreed, sufficiently pretty for all the purposes

of this world ; a lady by birth, — a circumstance which weighed considerably with Jack, — being the youngest daughter of the youngest son of the first cousin of an Irish baron glorying in the name of Fitz-Flannery. To say that she married the late Mr. Christopher Catling, of Cateaton Street, for his money, would be to admit that she was mercenary as well as poor : but that she *did*, as she considered it, sacrifice herself for the advantage and comfort of her mother and sister, is not to be doubted ; inasmuch as Mr. Christopher Catling did not, either in person or mind, manners or accomplishments, possess any of those qualifications which were likely to engage the tender affections of a “ lady ” of gentle blood and modern education.

During the lifetime of her gentle help-meet she remained secluded in his suburban residence in the neighbourhood of Highbury Barn, a villa with a brass-plate on the door, and a gas-lamp over it ; and, although her connexion with the Peerage was with difficulty ascertained, she was acknowledged in all the little

parties of that neighbourhood as the lady to be taken out first.

Of Catling's family stump,—for tree it could scarcely be called, — nobody knew much, not even himself ; — nobody cared, — for, let him *have been* what he might, they all knew what he *was*, — an opulent, honest, good-natured man ; and, as the tablet erected in Islington Church by his inconsolable widow remarks, “ as he lived respected, so he died lamented.” He had, however, been preceded to the grave by his wife's mother, Mrs. Fitz-Flannery ; and, at his death, his widow and her sister, after a due attention to the rules of decency and decorum, removed from Highbury to the more genteel and genial region of the Regent's Park, where, on one of the various banks which constitute its neighbourhood, she and her companion, at the period to which we now allude, resided.

The extraordinary confidence with which the late Mr. Catling had honoured Jacob, and the complete control he had given him over his property, placed the widow in an extremely

embarrassing position. During her husband's lifetime she regarded Jacob with a jealousy founded upon his evident power over her husband; a jealousy rendered not milder in its character by a suspicion that the old misanthrope, as she considered and called him, was securing Mr. Catling's confidence in *him*, by endeavouring to shake his confidence in *her*.

When she found herself a widow, left literally at the mercy of the man whom, to say the least, she could never bring herself to like, she grew peevish and nervous; and, not being blest with more than an average proportion of sense, she worried herself, and felt degraded at being obliged, in case her expenditure upon any extraordinary occasion happened to exceed her available resources, to apply to her trustee for an advance. The truth is, that the will of her husband was neither more nor less a memorial of *his* mistrust, than *her* tablet in Islington Church was a perpetuation of his merits and virtues: which of the two was the most sincere, we leave the reader to surmise.

It was in the second year of her widowhood

that Jacob, (before the invasion of Grosvenor Street house by Mortimer had occurred,) the trustee and sole executor and residuary legatee, had asked Helen to invite Mrs. Catling and her sister to dinner. The long-oppressed lady seemed to breathe again, in the air of the Western part of London; and the party happening to be small and agreeable, and John in high spirits, she was delighted with Helen, with Batley, (wondering that two such men as he and Jacob could be brothers,) and with the society in general. She saw the manner in which John treated his daughter; she saw the affection and devotion of Helen to her father, and thence justly and naturally argued in favour of his kindness of temper and disposition, upon which alone such mutual feelings could be founded: and then she looked round her and thought what a remarkably nice establishment it was, and how very agreeable it would be to be mistress of it; especially when Helen, by marriage, should leave that mistress in the enjoyment of undivided control, to mix with that class of society

to which, by birth, she herself really belonged, but from which, adverse circumstances, and her later connexions, had in a great degree excluded her.

Over these thoughts she brooded, and the fancy took strong hold of her ; but she had few opportunities of improving her acquaintance with Helen, or repeating her visits to the house, for she was not after Helen's heart ; and, when Mortimer came, the unqualified exile of uncle Jacob necessarily involved the exclusion of Mrs. Catling : nevertheless, it may be naturally inferred that, when Jacob mentioned her name to his brother as a " sure card " if he chose to play the game, he had been led to do so by what he had gathered in conversation with the lady herself, with whom he generally dined on Sundays, and by whom he was received with that equivocal hospitality which springs rather from fear than affection, and which is exhibited more in the hope of soothing than of satisfying the visiter.

" What can this mean ? " said Mrs. Catling to her sister Margaret Fitz-Flannery, as she

came into the breakfast-parlour of Shamrock Cottage, No. 120, South Bank, Regent's Park, the morning after the fraternal dinner at "The Horn;" "old Batley has sent to invite himself to dine here to-day."

"La, T'resa!" replied Margaret, "you don't say so! — what d'ye mean to do? not let him come, I hope."

"How upon earth can I avoid it?" said Teresa, "it is not wise in me to offend him — and, — it's exceedingly worrying; — Sundays I bargain for, and there is only one Sunday in a week, and one knows the worst; but here" —

"Oh!" interrupted Margaret, "send word we are engaged."

"But, my dear child," replied Mrs. Catling, "he will know that we are not; our visiting list is not so long as one of our visiting tickets, and he knows the name and residence of every one of the half-dozen select acquaintance we really happen to have. No, — come he must; and perhaps you will not be so violent in your objections when you hear that he proposes to bring a friend with him."

“ A friend ! ” said Margaret, “ what ! a gentleman friend ? ”

“ Sure yes,” said Mrs. Catling.

“ That ’s very handsome of him, considering,” said Margaret ; “ can you guess who ? ”

“ No,” said Mrs. Catling, “ but he puts ‘ a friend ’ — a gentleman who is very desirous of improving his acquaintance with you.”

“ I ’d lay my life,” said Margaret, “ it is either Mr. Grub, his head-clerk, or else that young Haddock, the alderman’s nephew.”

“ Well, there ’s one comfort,” said the mistress of the house ; “ Grub, or Haddock, or anybody else, will be better than having him all alone by himself.”

“ What is this postscript ? ” said Margaret, turning over the note ; “ did you see this ? ”

“ No,” replied Mrs. Catling, taking the note from her sister ; “ which ? ”

“ ‘ P. S. — Tripe is just coming in ; have some for dinner. Let the cook wash it twenty times over ; boil it in milk, and serve up with lots of onions. ’ ”

“ Tripe ! T’resa,” said Margaret.

“ Onions !” cried Teresa.

“ I hate tripe,” said Margaret.

“ And I can’t endure onions,” said Teresa ;
“ and he knows it.”

“ That makes no difference in the world to him,” said Margaret.

“ No ; self, self predominates,” said Teresa,
“ from objects of the greatest importance down to things of the smallest consequence. If, however, tripe is to be had, it must be got : whoever he brings will of course know his ways ; besides, he will not fail to boast of his authority in controlling my table, so that at all events we shall not be blamed by the stranger for being the projectors of such a dish.”

Having, therefore, soothed their excited feelings, and moderated the anger which the proposed indelicacy of having his favourite dainty had induced, Teresa wrote a kind and endearing note, expressing her delight that “ dear Mr. Batley ” was so kind and good-natured as to favour them with his company, and that they should be charmed to receive any friend of his ; and begging him to come as soon as he

could ; that dinner would be punctually ready by half-past four, and that the tripe should be absolutely smothered in onions as he desired. And then came Margaret uniting in kindest regards, and Teresa subscribing herself his faithful and sincere ; and all this was written on a sheet of pale pink note-paper, redolent of musk, and then folded and poked into a straw-coloured envelope with an embossed border of shamrocks, and closed with the impression of a seal on which was engraven a funeral urn with cypress twisting over it : and all this again was directed to “ Jacob Batley, Esq. Lilypot Lane,” and consigned to the custody of the “ young man ” who had brought his letter, and the sisters proceeded to consider and wonder who the stranger would turn out to be.

As for Mr. John Batley, as was his wont whenever he started a new object, his whole heart and soul were in the pursuit. With a vivid imagination which would have almost discredited the judgment of a boy of twenty, he proceeded, during the night of the eventful day when the subject was first opened to his

notice, to build castles of the most fanciful order and character : he saw domestic comfort restored to his house ; he should exhibit his fair wife to “ the world,” a triumphant practical refutation of any gossip which might get abroad as to his recent defeat ; and then it would be such a delightful thing for Helen to have so nice a person to associate with at Sadgrove, — one so much preferable to Madame St. Alme ; totally forgetting in the hurry of the moment that Helen had been more than ordinarily severe upon the widow Catling, and that he himself had been compelled to admit that, however lavish Nature had been in giving her personal beauty, she had not been equally attentive to her mental qualifications.

It was nearly one o'clock before Jack received Mrs. Catling's answer to his brother's note ; for, in order to save time and trouble to the messenger, Jacob had directed his “ young man,” Alick, to take the lady's reply direct to Grosvenor Street, so that John might be informed of the order of proceeding, and whether the ladies would receive them. He

took the note in his hand, and felt a little disheartened. Finery and tawdriness are so completely at variance with good taste and good sense, that the sight of the straw-coloured envelope staggered him : he proceeded, however, to break the melancholy seal. When he beheld the pink note itself, musky as it was,

—— “ and smelt it so,”

his heart failed him, — and who can wonder ? — a pink note enveloped in a yellow cover, with an embossed border, and sealed with putty-coloured wax, — all contrived to announce that the tripe should be cooked according to order, and smothered with onions.

Now, abstractedly and in point of fact, there are few things so good as this particular dish ; and nobody was more ready to subscribe to its excellence than Jack Batley, when he was out of “ the world,” from which it is affectedly proscribed : but not being aware that his worthy brother had made his conditions, or directed the preparation of this one favourite viand, it did seem to him a somewhat unsuitable topic to be conveyed through such a “ beautifully

elegant" medium. However, his resolve was taken ; the note was transmitted to Jacob in one of his own, announcing that he should be ready, whenever his brother called, to accompany him to Shamrock Cottage.

That Jacob *did* call, and that the brothers *did* go, we shall in due time be informed ; but as some little time must elapse, even supposing Jack's suit successful and the widow willing, before the affair can be concluded, it may not be amiss to draw the reader's attention from the anticipations of the ardent aspirant for the lady's favour, — of the happiness which he was destined to prove in his second marriage,—to a retrospect of what occurred at Sadgrove since he left it, or rather after the departure of the party from the Hall to the Fishing-House.

CHAPTER IV.

THE day was delightful ; everybody seemed in spirits—most of the party ~~were~~ those who were *not*, assumed a gaiety ~~to~~ to the occasion. To Helen, the sight of Mortimer driving the Countess in the phaeton was blissful, compared with what her own position would have been had she been in the Countess's place. As it happened, during their progress, neither of those who were on either side of Mrs. Mortimer asked one single question about the Fishing-House ; which, however important to everybody as the cause of their having an agreeable ride and a pleasant luncheon after it, nobody, save and except three of the party, cared one farthing about. The Lions of a neighbourhood are visited as a matter of course by everybody staying in a country-house ; but, however much

the geologist, the naturalist, or the antiquarian may delight in the research, the idlers run their eyes over a ridge of rocks, a tract of country, or a heap of ruins, merely as the accessories, if not the immediate cause, of an agreeable excursion. In fact, the conversation near the "lady of the house" turned chiefly upon the merits, or rather demerits, of the departed Thurstons; it being a remarkable fact,—or one might perhaps better say, a fact worthy of remark,—that, whether it be in public or private life, the fluency of vituperation against any individual object becomes infinitely more powerful,—playful perhaps it might be thought amongst what Mrs. Trollope calls "*La Haute Volée*," — the moment that the absence of the parties implicated is ascertained to be perfectly certain and likely to be permanent.

One thing contributed to relieve Helen's mind almost unconsciously, — the absence of Colonel Magnus. There was something in his manner, and in the distant coldness of his behaviour towards her, which his friends—the

few he had — attributed to shyness ; but which was so excessively like the result of pride and sullenness, that it required a much greater degree of intimacy with him than it seemed probable Helen ever would arrive at to ascertain its true character : and moreover, and beyond this, Helen had taken into her head, — erroneously perhaps, — that Mortimer had appointed his trusty friend to the office of guardian-dragon of his Worcestershire Hesperides ; in fact, that the fearful consciousness of his own demerits, and the natural suspicion of his character, had induced him to invest his high-minded friend with the chivalrous character of domestic spy.

If Helen could have satisfied herself that this were really the case, it is impossible to guess what consequent course she might have taken ; for, generally speaking, that sort of *surveillance* is sure to lead directly to the result which it is meant to avert. Nothing short of implicit and unqualified confidence satisfies a woman ; doubt her ever so little, and the chances are a hundred to one that she will

eventually justify your suspicions. The absence of Magnus was therefore, as has already been observed, a relief to her mind, she scarcely knew why; and accordingly she laughed and talked gaily and merrily as they wended their way to the beautiful bower.

The conversation being all pure "London," nobody paused to exclaim as the beauties of the scenery burst upon the view of the lively party, and Helen was consequently spared the necessity of acting novice: indeed, little was said at all germane to the matter till they arrived at the entrance of the temple, on the steps of which stood Mortimer and the Countess waiting to receive the "company."

"Well, Helen dear," said Mortimer, addressing himself specially to his wife, "what do you think of this snugger?"

"What I have seen of it," said Helen, "is quite charming."

"Come this way then," said the animated husband, who seemed resolved to make an effort to be unusually gay and cheerful; "I think I shall surprise you."

Saying which, he threw open the door of the circular room in which the banquet was spread, and took her to that window which commanded the most beautiful view of the rich valley through which the Severn rippled brightly, and which was skirted in the back-ground by the Malverns. The deepening tints of October had already beautifully varied the foliage ; and, as the fresh breeze blew on Helen's flushed cheek, she pressed the arm on which she was leaning, and said half unconsciously, " It is indeed lovely."

" I knew you would like it," said Mortimer ; and turning to the Countess, who was close behind them, added, " I told you, Countess, that Helen would be pleased."

" I never had a doubt of it," replied the lady, with a manner and in a tone which were evidently meant to imply something, — what, Helen could not exactly divine.

" Isn't it charming, Mrs. Mortimer ?" continued the worldly woman, throwing an expression into her countenance of triumph at the

successful manner in which they were deceiving her husband.

Helen seemed to shrink within herself at the sight of this odious look, which, although not understood by Mortimer, was neither unseen nor unfelt by him. It had just the effect of curdling all the suavity which he seemed to have stored up for use on this particular occasion. Its meaning was as mysterious to Mortimer as the Countess's previous glance at *him* had been to Helen: but it evidently had a meaning; and the little, little doubt which it engendered so completely counterbalanced all his hopes of temporary happiness, that he seemed at once to fall back into the morbid melancholy by which he was so frequently oppressed.

This tone once given to his mind, his memory recurred to all that had happened in the same scene years before. The bright expectation, that, by again familiarizing himself with his once favourite retreat with Helen, he might again enjoy its beauties, blest with the possession of a being as much devoted to him as she

had been who in other days had shared its charms and its pleasures, faded in an instant. Either Helen did not like the place, or, liking it, had been prepossessed unfavourably against it by the Countess, — which he thought most probable, — or, — it mattered not what the alternative was, — there was something hidden under the surface, and his peace of mind was gone for that day. Sure it is, as the vulgar man fancies that everybody who laughs in company is laughing at *him*, the guilty man fears in every look, and every observation, however vague the one, or general the other, an allusion to his own particular case. Mortimer turned from his wife and the Countess, and with a deep sigh, which he did not mean Helen to overhear, joined the group at the other window, at which Lady Mary, who was so nearsighted as not to know her husband three feet off, was descanting largely and diffusely upon the delightful distant view which the fishing-temple commanded.

“ Surely, Countess,” said Helen, “ Mortimer isn’t well ! ”

“ Oh,” said the Countess, “ nothing—don’t mind him ; he is only thinking of other days : that willow which now overhangs the bank so gracefully was planted by poor Amelia. I dare say something struck him, — don’t think anything about it ; nothing makes him worse than taking any notice or making any remark.”

“ I almost wish we hadn’t come,” said Helen.

“ Oh, never mind,” said the Countess St. Alme ; “ sooner or later you must have come, and never could there be a better time than when we have a merry party here.”

“ Yes,” said Helen ; “ but if Francis is sad, their mirth is no pleasure to me.”

“ Oh, it will all blow over,” replied the Countess : “ my delight is, how admirably you acted your surprise at the prettiness of the place.”

“ Oh, Countess, Countess !” said Helen, pushing gently past her, and going towards the group where Mortimer was, but looking at her at the moment as if she had stabbed her through the heart.

“ Good God !” thought Helen, “ what is

the spell this woman has over me? — what is the influence? Why am I made to deceive my husband without the least cause or reason? Why am I driven to embitter the moments of one to whose happiness my whole soul is devoted? — This *must* be conquered.”

The moment Helen joined Lady Mary's coterie, Mortimer left it on a pretence of showing Captain Harvey a particular sort of boat which he had built for his fishing excursions; but it was evident to Helen that her approach had been the signal for his departure. She felt a sort of wild determination to follow him: it seemed as if she were to lose him for ever if she did not make an exertion at that moment; if she admitted for once the possibility of her presence being repulsive, she admitted all that could render her miserable for life. Her eyes swam; she felt her cheek flushed, and seemed, for the moment, imbued with a giant's strength and resolution.

“Come, Lady Mary,” said she, “let us go and see this famous boat, too; why should the men have it all their own way?”

This was said with apparent gaiety, and followed by a laugh, in which, alas! there was no mirth.* Lady Mary, who took things as they came, thought Helen had some reason for wishing to see the boat, about which her ladyship cared no more than she did for its hospitable owner; and accordingly, taking the arm that Helen offered, they “trotted off,” to use her ladyship’s own expression, to the boat-house where this wonderful bark was resting.

The Countess saw this movement; and having, what the world calls, “all her eyes about her,” she saw also that she had wounded Helen’s feelings, and that Helen really cared for Francis a great deal more than she at first thought she did: this, for some yet undiscovered reason, rendered the unhappy Helen — for such she seemed destined to be — more hateful to her than she was before; and, while the anxious wife was gone on a journey of love to her captious husband, her charming friend was calculating the means of undoing all the

poor girl hoped to do in the way of soothing and conciliating him.

When Helen found the truant, he seemed surprised and pleased at her pursuit of him, and chided her jestingly for her fear of losing him.

“I assure you, dear Francis,” said Helen, “I was wondering whither you had flown on my approach ; and, as everybody seems ready for luncheon, I enlisted Lady Mary to be my comrade in overtaking and apprehending the deserter.”

“I am sure, dear, it is very flattering to be so hunted,” said Francis. “Where is your friend, the Countess ?”

“*My* friend !” said Helen in a tone unlike that which she usually adopted when speaking of her intimate associates, — “*your* friend, Francis.”

The sunshine of his countenance was gone in an instant ; a frown again contracted his brow ; and turning away hastily, as if to conceal his feelings, he proceeded to point out to Harvey some peculiar advantages derivable to

the fisherman from the particular construction of his vessel.

“Why, my dear,” said Lady Mary in a sort of whisper, “what sharp lectures you can give in a few words !”

“How ?” said Helen.

“I mean, the way you snubbed your husband about *his* friend the Countess,” said Lady Mary.

“I—I snub !” said Helen ; “my dear Lady Mary, I assure you I am not at all a lecturer. I merely said what was true : Francis introduced me to the Count and Countess, and they *are* his friends, not mine.”

“Yes,” said Lady Mary, “that’s all very true ; only——Did you ever see young Blockford, her son ?”

“Yes,” said Helen, “he has been staying here : those two drawings I showed you in my boudoir were done by him.”

“Yes, I know,” said Lady Mary ; “but I did not know whether you had seen *him* : that’s all. I——Oh ! here she comes.”

—And so she did come, accompanied by

her husband. But what Lady Mary had said sounded very odd to Helen ; she could not comprehend it : and yet it seemed to be meant to have a meaning, and somewhat of an ill-natured meaning too, as regarded the Countess, whom Lady Mary hated most cordially.

“ Dearest Countess,” said Lady Mary, “ are you come to bear witness to this pretty pilgrimage of love ? Helen has been husband-hunting.”

“ I hope,” said the Countess, “ she has caught her dear, for we are all starving.”

“ Yes,” said Helen in a subdued tone, above which she somehow felt she could not raise her voice ; “ he is coming, I believe.”

“ Well,” said the Countess, “ as *you* are here, we need not wait for *him* : so, come, let us rally ; I think we shall all be the better for something to eat.”

—“ And a leetle to drink of de champagne,” said the Count ; which was all he said during the whole of the day.

“ I should like to wait for Mortimer,” said Helen.

“ I ’ll go and fetch him,” said the Countess ; and, suiting the action to the word, she proceeded to the boat-house.

Helen felt a chill run through her veins as this was said and done : but what her feelings were cannot be described, when, upon raising her eyes from the ground, she beheld those of Lady Mary fixed upon her, with an expression of surprise at the free and easy manner of her friend, and of the quiet way in which Helen seemed to endure her domination.

All Lady Mary said was, “ Well ! ”—but her looks conveyed an idea that she thought a great deal more.

Strange to say, however much worried, however much excited, however much vexed by the Countess, Helen never before had entertained the slightest suspicion of that which, for her misery, at this moment flashed into her mind. It was clear as light ; Lady Mary, a woman of “ the world,” was aware of it : Helen was looked upon by her own guests as a victim, — as a duped, deceived wife, — and the Countess was — But was it probable, was it

possible, that in the first month of his marriage with *her* he should seek not only to renew an old acquaintance with this woman, but bring her into the society and into a constant association with his young wife? The thing would not be believed even in a novel; and yet —.

And then came the collecting in her mind the ten thousand nothings, — the

“Trifles light as air,”—

which had occurred during the Countess's domestication at Sadgrove; — the circumstance of the visit to this very fishing-temple: — but no, no, — it must be calumny, — it must be the jealousy which women cannot repress — the envy they cannot control: — and yet, why should Lady Mary be envious of the Countess St. Alme? Still, the look she gave! — and then the manner of the men who were staying there, while addressing her! — there seemed to be an ease, an almost boldness of familiarity, in their conduct towards her, totally different from that which they observed towards herself, or Lady Mary, or any other of the visitors. And then, the rooted hatred of Mortimer's sister for

her, — for of this she was made aware by the necessity Mortimer felt for giving some strong reason why Mrs. Farnham refused to join the Sadgrove party : — in fact, all in one moment were conjured up, by the glance of Lady Mary's bright blue eyes, visions innumerable, doubts, suspicions, dreads, and alarms, to which Helen's mind had yet been a stranger.

Helen's spirit was a proud one : she would bear with patience and with perseverance all the ills and sorrows of mortal life to serve, to soothe, to save the being she loved : nay, marrying Mortimer as she did, with a knowledge of his character, and of the follies, and even vices, of his earlier life, she was prepared to make allowances, and to look over with kindness and consideration whatever circumstances connected with his former marriage might militate against their perfect happiness ; but, the moment she fancied that she was made a dupe of, and that “ the world ” pitied her blindness or meanness in enduring a rival near the throne, all other feelings sank into shade.

Candid, plain-spoken, and open-hearted as she was, how was she to smother this volcano in her bosom?—how was she, who never knew, until lured into it by this very Countess, what deception meant, to conceal from him to whom she was devoted the dreadful thoughts which had been created in her mind? How could she bear to look upon the Countess?—how, to see her the usual companion of her husband? And yet, so did it happen, that as she turned from Lady Mary, and while yet all that has been written was flashing, lightning-like, through her brain, she saw the Countess gaily approaching them, leaning on Mortimer's arm.

Whether Lady Mary saw how her blow had told, or not, one cannot ascertain: she certainly followed it up in the most skilful manner by saying, with all the carelessness imaginable, —

“Well, dear, although *you* went out to hunt your husband, the Countess has secured the prize.”

“So I see,” said Helen, — and she drew her hand rapidly across her eyes, — perhaps to

brush away a tear : “let us be revenged, Lady Mary, and leave them to follow us.”

Lady Mary was as much a woman of the world in her way as the Countess was in hers, and duly appreciated this forced piece of gaiety on the part of Helen ; however, as she had carried her point, and done her duty by enlightening her fair hostess, she, of course, entered into the little divertisement with the greatest alacrity.

The luncheon served, the soup, according to the terms of the treaty, hot, the champagne cold, the party seated, the windows closed, and the snug circle formed, everybody seemed at home. All the sight-seeing part of the morning being past, the refreshment after labour, which is alike essential to free-masons and those of the “profane,” seemed to put everybody in good-humour, excepting two persons, by whom was all the gaiety provided. Mortimer and Helen were the only two who were compelled to act a part ; they were both wretched : Mortimer, for a thousand reasons connected with the present and the past ; and

Helen, merely because she was under the dreadful spell of a sorceress, to whose influence she had been subjected by her husband, and by whose arts the confidence of that husband had been already, to a certain extent, shaken.

What position could be more painful than that of this man and wife? Devoted to each other, if their feelings and affections had been allowed fair play, they were, without the slightest reason, estranged from each other; and here were two hearts, in which were sown the seeds of mutual love, throbbing in this hour of gaiety with pain, with grief, with doubt, with jealousy.

It is said, that it is "better to be at the end of a feast than at the beginning of a 'fray;" now, as Sterne says, "That I deny." Nothing is more agreeable to the eye than the gay brightness of a *dejeuner à la fourchette* like this of Mortimer's: look at it when its "hour is past," the ruins by no means splendid; viewed, too, after the appetite (which, *par parenthèse*, is always better at luncheon-time than at the supper-hour of modern din-

ners,) has been gratified, — the mutilated jellies, the abandoned legs of fowls, the scattered lobster salad, the desolated piles of prawns, and all the rest of it. Things had arrived at this point, and the listlessness of the flushed guests manifested itself by their rising from table, and beginning to feel chilly, and talking about the horses and the carriages and going back again. There it is, — all pleasure must end in this sublunary world ; and accordingly orders were given for making preparations for the departure.

“ I cannot go,” said the Countess, “ without seeing my poor dear nice old woman. Here, sir,” continued this most amiable of her sex, speaking to one of the footmen, “ go, and send Willis’s old woman here,—the guardian nymph, as I call her, of the fishing-temple.”

“ Poor old soul !” said Mortimer ; “ I really believe that she is as proud of her post here as a governor-general is at Calcutta : she takes a delight in the place.”

—“ And,” whispered the Countess, “ Amelia gave her the office.”

Helen did not hear these words, but she saw the action which accompanied it. Mortimer raised his hand towards his face, and seemed, in what might be called friendly anger, to repel the remark by motioning the Countess from him.

Helen, not daunted by the feelings with which circumstances had inspired her, joined her husband and his friend, who, with a cunning inherent in her nature, had, during the repast, felt that something *had* occurred to change Helen's views of her position in the family circle, and who seemed proportionally the more resolved upon mischief. It would be invidious to notice how many glasses of champagne she drank at luncheon, but there seemed to be in her air and manner a restless anxiety for something to happen at this particular moment, for which Helen, who noticed her agitation, could not account.

The side-door of the round room was opened; and in walked, as they say, "as nice and as neat as a new pin," our old friend *La Curatrice*.

"Well, old lady," said Mortimer, "how

do you get on? You are one of those ever-greens upon which time and seasons have no effect. Are you comfortable and happy?"

"Yes, sir," said the old woman; "quite so, thank you, sir. I hope, ladies, you are quite well," added the grateful rustic, addressing Mrs. Mortimer and the Countess.

"Quite well, thank you," was the answer of both.

"Here, my good woman," said Mortimer, slipping a sovereign into the wood-like palm of her shrivelled hand; "you must not forget the day of our first visit to the Fishing-House."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," said she, dropping a curtsy, from which it appeared somewhat improbable that she would ever recover. "I hope, ma'am," added she, addressing Helen, "you like the way I had those muslin curtains put up: I could not get the man to send home the pink ones which you told me to get cleaned."

Helen felt as if she should sink into the earth. Mortimer looked astounded.

"Why," said he, "what are you talking

of?—this lady has never been here before. Are you dreaming?”

“No, sir,” said the woman: “dreaming!—I never dream till I go to sleep, and not often that now. My lady there ordered me to get the curtains which used to be in the inner room”——

Mortimer looked at Helen, who hid her face in her hands, and sank on to a chair in the verandah.

“There,” said the Countess, bursting into a laugh; “that will do, old lady: nobody *can* have secrets in this world.—Go along. Here is a pretty discovery, Helen dear.”

“God help me!” said Helen.

“What does all this mean?” said Mortimer. “Have I been duped,—deceived,—made a fool of?—taught to bring Helen here as a surprise,—as something to delight her,—and she has been”——

“Oh! Mortimer,” said Helen, “do not—do not”——

“My dear Mrs. Mortimer,” said the Countess, “pray consider: do not make a scene.

I'll explain it all to Francis: you are not in the least to blame; it is all *my* fault."

"Let me go in," said Helen; "I cannot face these people. Oh! Francis, Francis, have mercy upon me!"

"This is most extraordinary!" said Mortimer.

"Let me lean on you, Mortimer," said Helen.

"Countess," said he, "lead her in."

"No, no, no, Mortimer," sobbed Helen, — "you, you!"

She leant on his arm, and he did lead her to the door of the boudoir; but, as he went, he cast a look at the Countess, which, if she had possessed the common feelings of humanity, would have wrung her heart: — but no; she turned from his gaze with an air of triumph, and, joining her particular friend Lady Mary, merely said, in answer to an enquiring simper,

"A little domestic happiness, — that's all!"

The manner in which Lady Mary received this explanation might have satisfied the Countess, and perhaps did satisfy her, that the cha-

racter of her influence in the family was not altogether agreeable to the ladies who visited Sadgrove: however, there is a certain class of adventurous women in the world, who, after having run a long career without having been actually "found out," seem resolved to fight the whole battle, and defy the usual prejudices of society, — as wicked or foolish ministers endeavour to bolster up their worst or weakest actions by heaping rewards and honours upon those who have been the active agents for carrying their ruinous designs into execution.

She turned away from Lady Mary, and, affecting a solicitude in which she knew neither Mortimer nor his wife would put too much faith, enquired at the door of the boudoir how Helen was.

Helen was leaning her burning forehead on Mortimer's bosom: he had placed her on a sofa, and drawn his chair beside it. The circumstances, the innocent disclosure made by the poor old woman, the surprise it occasioned him, and the fearful agitation of his poor wife,

filled him with wonder and alarm ; but when Helen, hearing the Countess's voice, clung closer to him and held him fast, he felt that the course he was pursuing, and the line of conduct his hateful friend was adopting, was one which must be abandoned.

“ Do not, do not let her come in,” whispered Helen.

“ No, no,” said Mortimer, almost terrified into submission ; “ I will speak to her myself.”

“ Francis, Francis dearest, do not leave me !” said Helen.

“ But for one moment,” said Francis.

And in that brief space of time he communicated to the Countess the absolute necessity for keeping Helen quiet ; nor did he fail to express by his manner his almost abhorrence of her conduct in making his innocent wife a party to a deception in the exposure of which she seemed to delight.

Certain it is that the Countess was by no means pleased with the manner in which her kind attentions to Helen were dispensed with by Mortimer ; and the look she gave him con-

vinced him that, however much his natural feeling for the peculiarity of his wife's position under the influence of such a woman might in fact predominate, it became a matter of policy, for reasons known to himself, to conceal, if possible, the resentment which he could not help entertaining towards the author of the mischief which had occurred, and the misery which had resulted, as far as the suffering Helen was concerned.

“ Francis !” said Helen, violently agitated, “ Francis, acquit me of this deception ! It is no act of mine ; it is ”——

— “ Stay, Helen,” interrupted Mortimer. “ I am quite ready, and most willing, to make all allowances ; but surely no human being, man or woman, ought to usurp that confidence which is of right a husband's. It is true that the book I saw this morning in your room was sent you by the Countess ; I do not doubt it : the coincidence as to its contents is curious. I have no doubt either that the Countess brought you to this place ; it must be so : — but what then, Helen ? — why conceal the

truth? If you had not some very particular reason, it would have been the most natural thing in the world to have told me of your visit here."

"I should have told you all, Francis," said Helen.

"Should!" repeated Mortimer;—"but you did *not*, Helen, say one syllable about it. You suffered me to tell our visitors that you had never been here, and that this day should be a surprise to you: you never checked me—never said you had been here. What will these people think, when it turns out"—

"These people!" said Helen: "oh! Mortimer, my beloved Mortimer! what these people think or say, matters nothing to me: it is to you alone I look; it is for what *you* think I alone care. I was warned by the Countess not to tell you; and, if I could make you comprehend all I have endured since we were here yesterday till this moment, you would pity me."

"But, dearest," said Mortimer, "where in all this is the evidence of that strength of mind

for which you have been so long, and even so early in life, remarkable? What right, I ask, has man or woman to the allegiance of a wife, when coming in competition with a husband? The pure ingenuousness"——

"Oh, spare me, Mortimer!" said Helen, "spare me; I am wrong—I know it; but indeed—indeed I was misled; I *was* influenced."

"Well," said Mortimer, "I should have thought you could have resisted the influence of Madame St. Alme in my favour."

"Francis," said Helen, clasping her hands, "why—why did you ever render the trial possible?"

"It was by your own invitation they came here," said Mortimer.

"How, and by whom suggested?" said Helen.

"I thought you would find society agreeable here," said Mortimer; "and I"——

"What society did I ever wish for but yours, Francis?" said Helen; "besides, have we not plenty of society without fixing our-

selves so decidedly and permanently with one family?"

"Perhaps," said Mortimer, "any old friends of mine are objectionable to you?"

"No, no," said Helen; "but you — you yourself, not four hours since, spoke to me of the Countess, not as if you loved her."

"Loved her!" said Mortimer.

"I mean, liked her," said Helen.

"To be sure," muttered Mortimer; "what else should you mean? Loved her! — who has been talking to you in this strain?"

"In what strain, dearest?"

"Dearest," said Francis, "your mind has been unsettled; some devil has been at work here: — what do you mean by my loving the Countess, Helen?"

"I merely used the word," said Helen, terrified at her husband's manner, "as one uses it in common parlance."

"This is all wrong," said Mortimer; "the train is fired, — everything is deception; the ground we tread is mined — hollowed. Who has been poisoning your mind against me?"

“No one,” said Helen, growing calmer and more determined as she saw her husband’s anger rise. “I have spoken of you to no human being except the Countess, who has known you so long. Mortimer,” added she, rising from the sofa on which she had been reclining, “you do not know me yet. I am too proud to make confidences; and all that I have heard, and all that has been insinuated by your friend the Countess, I have treated with disdain: and now you shall see how this proud heart that you continue to fancy capable of deceit and meanness shall bear me through this struggle. — Let us join our *friends*; they will wonder why we stay so long from them: and, if I perish in the struggle, no tear shall dim these eyes, no sigh shall heave this breast; and, since I *can* dissemble, Francis, I will make the effort now, that these hollow-hearted guests of ours may not be gratified with that which^{*} of all things would please them most, — a domestic quarrel. But mark me, Francis; I have been led into this by *your* friend: let me be released from her influence, and I shall be happy.”

Saying which, she hastily put together her disturbed hair, which, after a ride and stroll upon the Severn's banks, was not likely to be in the best order ; and playfully, almost wildly, said,

“ Give me your arm, Francis. Do not degrade me ; I do not deserve it : — let these people know nothing of this.”

Mortimer was startled by her manner, utterly overcome by the occurrences of the morning, and driven to an extremity by the demand of his wife with regard to the Countess : but, although convinced that she had been the victim of that artful woman's cunning, the conviction had taken full possession of him that he had, nevertheless, fallen in her estimation ; that his influence over her was now only secondary ; that other persons of the party had stimulated her in what he considered a rebellion against his will ; and, above all, he felt that the woman who, under any circumstances in the world, could coolly and deliberately conceal a visit made the day before to the spot to which her husband was avowedly and osten-

sibly to take her for the first time, would, upon any more important occasion, play the hypocrite with equal skill and success.

Mortimer, however, implicitly obeyed Helen's suggestions, and they rejoined the party as if nothing had happened; the Countess having, however, been good enough to throw out insinuations quite sufficient to counteract the good effects producible by Helen's struggle and triumph over her feelings. The arrangements for the return home were made. The Countess again mounted the phaeton, and Helen again joined the equestrians.

What the conversation might have been which passed between Mortimer and the Countess on the road, it is impossible to say, or what art she might have exercised to fashion the events of the morning after her own will; but this one thing is certain, that on that morning were sown in the heart and mind of the master of Sadgrove the seeds of a mistrust which germinated too luxuriantly, and produced a harvest of evils for which the gathering-time has not yet arrived.

CHAPTER V.

NEVER had Helen entered Sadgrove with feelings like those which oppressed her on her return this day; and surely, never, taking all the events which seemed likely to result from the unsettlement of Mortimer's mind into the calculation, did there arise a stronger or more dreadful illustration of the principle, that great events turn upon extremely small ones. The whole affair of the Fishing-House, with all the concomitant proceedings, was one of the most trifling nature; but it involved a spirit of deception and insincerity which alarmed and grieved him. It might be perfectly true, — nay, the Countess subsequently admitted and protested that it was, — that she was the sole cause and origin of the visit; but, although her candour upon this part of the transac-

tion was most laudable, it did not go the whole length of avowing that she also was the cause and origin of the concealment of that visit. She left Mortimer to put his own construction upon Helen's silence on the subject, which he, instead of attributing to the influence of her dangerous friend, laid to the account of her abhorrence of the scene of his former happiness; and this, coupled with his previous discovery of the book, roused in his breast the ever latent feeling, that he was hated and despised for his former crimes by her to whom he had looked for consolation and an oblivion of the past.

Helen, who had made up her mind to a quarrel on their return, was almost painfully disappointed by beholding the sullen calmness of her husband throughout the rest of the day. She was all spirit and animation: she would have vindicated her conduct, explained its causes, and, even if Mortimer's anger had been roused, would have borne it all with the certain assurance that she should eventually convince him of her innocence, of everything, except — sub-

mission to the influence of the Countess St. Alme; — but no: Mortimer's brow was overcast, and he seemed melancholy and unhappy, but he was studiously kind — almost polite — in his manner towards his wife when he did address her during the day; but the affection and tenderness which were dear to her heart were absent. The well-bred gentleman could not endure the idea of “a scene;” and, although he engaged himself generally in conversation with his visitors, no eyes except those which were accustomed to watch with tender anxiety every turn of his countenance, could have detected the change which to them was but too evident.

In this state Helen could not bear to exist: the idea of living, as it were, upon sufferance, — upon the negative, the conditional affection of her husband, — was worse than death.

“Mortimer,” said she, when they retired for the night, with difficulty suppressing her tears, “I cannot endure the change in your manner and conduct towards me, which is so evident. If I have offended you, tell me so; if I have

been guilty of any disobedience, — of any fault either of omission or commission, — chide me, rebuke me, and I will willingly submit myself to your judgment ; but to be neglected, slighted, shunned, — I cannot, indeed I cannot, bear it.”

“ I know of no fault,” said Mortimer, — “ I feel no anger ; I may, perhaps, be a little surprised at the skill which you exhibited in acting this morning during our excursion. I know no reason why you should have taken the trouble to deny that you had previously visited the fishing-temple.”

— “ I never *did* deny it, Mortimer,” said Helen.

“ No,” said Mortimer, “ I grant you *that* ; but your tacit admission that you never had, — your dissembled surprise when I pointed out its beauties, — in short, every part of your conduct was, as you know, meant to deceive me into the belief that you were till then, a stranger even to its existence.”

“ That is true,” said Helen ; “ but you do not ask me why I permitted myself to adopt

the course of which you complain, and not unjustly either. I admit the fault; but I acted under an influence, and in the belief that I was doing *that* which would most conduce to your tranquillity and pleasure."

"How could you believe, Helen," said Mortimer, "that I had any object in concealing from you the existence of this pretty toy, except that of surprising you by a visit to it when the fit season should have arrived?"

"I *did* think so," said Helen; "or, trust me, I never should have acted as you say I have."

"That seems strange!" said Mortimer, in a tone of doubtingness, which, to a heart like Helen's, was unbearable.

"It is *not* strange," sobbed his wife: "I was taught to think so, by one who seems, or pretends at least, to know more of your temper and character than any one else,—the Countess."

"What!" said Mortimer; "are you jealous, Helen?"

This brief question gave a sudden turn to

Helen's thoughts and feelings and a dialogue, for which Mortimer was scarcely prepared.

"Jealous!" said Helen, turning crimson, — "jealous, Mortimer! — no: if I were jealous, God knows what I might do; but I am *not*. No, Francis, never till this moment did I think, — did I fancy" —

"Hush! dearest Helen," said Mortimer, "I only joked: I" —

"This is no time for joking, Mortimer," said Helen. "With a heart all your own, — with a devotion to you such as woman perhaps never felt for man, — with an earnest and unceasing desire to gain, not your love only, but your esteem and respect, — I have been led in half-a-dozen instances to conduct myself, not, as *I* thought, according to your views or wishes, but in strict conformity with the opinions of the Countess St. Alme as to what would most conduce to your happiness and tranquillity."

"Did she use the word tranquillity?" muttered Mortimer.

"I merely echo her expression," said Helen.

“ *She* never told me *this*,” said Mortimer abstractedly.

“ *I* tell you, Mortimer,” said Helen;—“ and,” added she, looking bitterly indignant at the sort of doubt of her veracity which, if not expressed by words, seemed half implied by her husband’s tone and manner, “ I suppose I am at least to be believed.”

Scenes like this, dialogues like this, and the feelings whence they took their rise, are too painful to be long dwelt upon: a brief glance at them, exhibits all the misery which presently exists, and which is for the future to be apprehended.

Let the veil then fall over the rest of this discussion: it ended in Mortimer’s conviction that Helen was all truth and ingenuousness, and that she was the dupe and creature of the Countess St. Alme. But, in the midst of this conviction, there grew up a jealousy indescribable by words, and almost incalculable in thought,—a jealousy that racked his heart and disturbed his mind,—not that which he himself felt, but which he believed Helen to feel

towards the lost, fallen Amelia ! The plain, straightforward step which would have ensured his comfort would have been, the banishment of the Countess St. Alme from his domestic circle. Intriguing, complex and manifold, characterized that vivacious lady ; and, while she remained to keep alive the recollection of other days, nothing like happiness could be expected ; the more especially as, if any human being could have searched her heart and mind, they would have ascertained that whatever might be her present feelings towards Helen, her detestation of Amelia Lady Hillingdon was ten times more powerful and invincible.

It has already been said, that Mortimer, at the end of the discussion which took place upon the present occasion, was convinced that Helen *had* been misled, deceived, and betrayed by the Countess ; but that conviction was rendered less satisfactory — if satisfactory ought to be the word — by the evidence adduced from events of the readiness of Helen to lend herself to what could be considered neither more nor less than deception, negative or positive,

of the man to whom her devotion was unquestioned ; and so, out of her anxiety to conform herself to his character and disposition under the control of the Countess, there was created in his imagination, besides the sensitive jealousy to which we have before alluded, a vision of weakness on her part, or rather a facility of complying with the views and opinions of others, with regard to his character and conduct, which tormented him during the rest of the night even more, perhaps, than the conviction that she had, of her own free-will, deceived him upon this occasion, would have done.

To do this extraordinary man justice, it must be admitted, that in the morning the thought which ought first to have suggested itself to his mind did glimmer there ; he *did* begin to think that the stay of the Countess had been sufficiently protracted : and yet, how to remove her ? — what to say to induce her to leave the place she liked most, and the place where, in England, if truth were to be told, she could alone conduct herself as she did while she was in it. The difficulty was over-

come by circumstances; and those, circumstances which in their combination operated most curiously to meet the views of various persons, the gratification of which, a few weeks before, would have been thought incompatible with the arrangements of the family.

Ten days passed away after the excursion, and, of course, after this discussion; one or two visitors went, one or two new ones came: but the Countess St. Alme remained in the centre of the circle, fixed as steadily and securely as the Flag-ship in Portsmouth Harbour; and there she probably would have remained much longer but for the arrival of the following letter from Jack Batley to his daughter, which, as it involves a description of everything essential that occurred after his receipt of the pinky-rosy, musky, putty-sealed missive from Mrs. Teresa Catling, will serve to enlighten us not only as to what has happened in London and the Regent's Park, but what is likely to occur at Sadgrove Park in Worcestershire.

“ MY DEAR HELEN, Grosvenor St., Nov. —.

“ What I am about to write may perhaps in some sort surprise you ; although, I know enough of matrimonial happiness to know that family secrets are no secrets at all, and that therefore through Mortimer, if not by any other means, you are by this time, and have been long before, made perfectly aware of the very ridiculous mistake I made with regard to the Thurstons.

“ I declare to you, my dear child, that I had not courage to explain to you the nature of my defeat, or rather the miscarriage of my suit with that amiable family ; nor should I ever have touched upon the subject had I not previously assured myself of the certainty of being able to place myself in a position calculated not only to overcome the small obloquy which might attach to a venial error, but to present you with a mother-in-law, of whom, I am sure, you will be as fond as I am proud.

“ You will recollect, my dearest girl, a remarkably pretty, sprightly, blue-eyed, fair-haired widow, of the name of Catling, who,

just out of her weeds, dined with us twice last season in Grosvenor Street. I think, somehow, you did not quite sympathize with me in my admiration of her:—*I* thought her charming: well, *n'importe!*—you are settled brightly and happily, and therefore her dominion cannot in any way affect you. The fact is, we are engaged: she has a pretty jointure, not large, but enough; with what *I* have, to make us quite happy for life; and I shall be enabled to secure her an equally good income with that which she now possesses, after my death, if, as the common course of nature indicates, I should go first.

“ This, I think, will please you, — at least, dearest Helen, I hope it will; for my success in this proceeding involves, as far as I look at it, no small degree of respectability to my personal character. To me the pleasure of seeing you and Mortimer at the celebration of the marriage would be great; and although I am aware of his disinclination from my brother, still he has been upon the present occasion so kind and liberal that I should consider his meeting Jacob on the wedding-day a personal favour.

“ I cannot explain all the particulars of Jacob’s conduct, but it has been such as to justify me in putting him forward; and, although he affects a perfect indifference to matters of the sort, I think he would feel pleased at finding your husband and yourself so far disposed to approve of his proceedings in this affair as to sanction its conclusion by your presence.

“ In the negotiations for my marriage, I gave Teresa several reasons for my anxiety that they should be perfected with all possible expedition. I admit to you that the real one was not communicated to her; and although Jacob was in the secret, such has been his friendship and discretion that he has never even remotely alluded to it, his only joke being that I was in so great a hurry to get married because I felt that I had no time to lose: this she took in good part, and, I must do her the justice to say, seemed to participate in my proposal to expedite our settlement as much as possible. The result of all this is, that we are to be married on the twelfth, that is to

say, Tuesday se'nnight. The old proverb says, 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure;' the falsehood of which we shall practically expose: but, having gained so much, and carried my point, so far as I am myself concerned, I am now anxious with regard to the arrangements to which the attention of 'the world' is to be called.

"Of course we^{we} shall be married by special licence; the expense is nothing, compared with the *éclat*. Then for bridesmaids, Miss Fitz-Flannery, Teresa's sister, will be one; and, I think, Miss Rouncivall, Lady Bembridge's niece, another. If I can lay hold of a bishop at this season in town, he shall officiate; if not, we have a dean certain: but, even with this, and some twenty persons for the *déjeuner*,—and in the beginning of November one must scrape hard to muster so many,—the affair would be *manqué* without you and Mortimer: your presence would give a propriety, a character, a respectability to it, especially as the wound I received was inflicted at Sadgrove; your being at the wedding would at once show to the world the

nature and character of your feelings and Mortimer's, and put down every whisper militating against the reasonableness of my conduct."

In this way Batley contrived to fill four sides of his letter, arguing, as it seems, that the memory of one absurdity is to be extinguished by the commission of another; not seeing, in the hurry of his vanity smarting under its wounds, that nothing could more glaringly proclaim the heartlessness of his intended offer to Miss Thurston, than his almost immediate union with the widow Catling. As to that step being the consequence of despair, it was not likely that any woman would believe *that*. Because, although spite might drive a man to such an extremity, it was no doubt taken in the hopes of happiness with another, to the certain and eternal exclusion of a chance of realizing it with the original object. However, Mr. John was off upon one of his "point-blank," "slap-dash" enterprises, and nobody could have stopped him, had anybody been so disposed; knowing which, and, moreover, seeing

no "just cause or impediment" why he should not "follow his own vagary," Helen contented herself with showing his letter to Mortimer, gently arguing in favour of acceding to the wishes expressed in it.

There can be no doubt that her principal motive in undertaking the advocacy of her parent's cause was the desire that he should be gratified and pleased, not perhaps unmixed with a kindly leaning towards her uncle, who had always evinced more kindness, or, perhaps one might more properly say, less indifference, towards her than towards other people; yet, if her heart had been laid open, and the inmost thoughts of her mind revealed, the chances are, that, with all these hopes and wishes, there would have been found mingled the expectation that such a move as her father suggested would have the effect of unsettling the Count and Countess St. Alme, who, although the party was broken up, and all but one or two men were visitors gone, still remained as calmly and peaceably domiciled as if they were in the château St. Alme, on the Loire, instead of being guests at

Sadgrove Hall, on the banks of the Severn. In fact, from some hints and allusions which the Countess had dropped, Helen began to think that their stay would be protracted till after the end of the term at Oxford, when Francis Blocksford would be able to join them on their return to France, where the Count proposed to keep Christmas, and whither she also felt afraid that Mortimer would suggest their accompanying them.

This chain of events, galling as Helen felt it even by anticipation, she fancied might be broken by the arrangements for her father's wedding: the mere change of scene and circumstances for a few days would be a relief to her, inasmuch as it would withdraw her from the immediate influence of the woman whom she was taught at once to hate, to doubt, and fear, and yet compelled to seem to love. Her eloquence, therefore, in setting forth the justice of her parent's views, and the duty she owed him, and the pleasure it would give him, and the gratitude he would feel to Mortimer if he acceded to his request, was most remarkable.

The marriage of her father was eulogized as prudent and wise; the widow-bride was depicted in glowing colours, her beauty heightened, and her wealth increased; her worth and accomplishments were put before him in their brightest array, until Mortimer began to listen to the proposal, which he at first treated with ridicule and a refusal, with something like patience, and even an incipient desire to be present at the ceremony.

He *had* business in town: they could stay either at an hotel, or in Grosvenor Street; and——

“Why not offer them Sadgrove as a retirement for the honey-moon?” said Helen, half jokingly and half in earnest.

“No, no,” said Mortimer, “that would involve us in a longer stay in London than I should like; besides, what should we do with the St. Almes?”

It is impossible to guess what might have been Helen's answer if she had felt it convenient to offer an opinion; as it was, the question itself was an ample answer to her “pre-

vious question," and she received it accordingly with a sort of doubting expression of countenance and a considerably prolonged "w-h-y;" leaving Mortimer to supply whatever else might be necessary to settle their destination. So much, however, was achieved by this manœuvre, (and let us only look at the prospect of happiness in a family where manœuvring was the order of the day, after a few months only had elapsed since its establishment,) as went to empower the lady at this critical juncture just to enquire how long he expected the St. Almes to stay.

Upon Mortimer this question, its causes, its objects, its points, were not lost; and yet he would have been infinitely better pleased if it had not been asked. He was conscious, not only that the presence of the Countess produced exactly the effect upon Helen that Helen described, but that' he himself was anxious beyond measure to see her depart; but he could not, for some reason known to himself, and, as it appeared, to himself alone, or, if not, to the Countess and himself in partnership,

hasten or hurry in any rough or unseemly manner that departure.

“No,” said Mortimer: “I am sure, Helen, anything that can gratify you, or please your father, I am most ready to do; and, as we cannot be pestered by the coarsenesses of “uncle Jacob” for more than one day, under existing circumstances I shall be too glad to do what your father calls “honour his nuptials with our presence.”

“And the St. Almes?” asked Helen.

“Oh,” answered Mortimer, “we will leave them here: we shall be away but four days at most; and if we should have anybody down here—I forget if any people are engaged to us—that week, the Countess can do the honours during your brief absence.”

That she might be perfectly able to do so, Helen did not mean to dispute; neither did she, beginning as she did to understand Mortimer’s disposition and character, propose to dissent in the slightest degree from the lady’s appointment as regent of Sadgrove during her own absence, inasmuch as, besides not wishing

to ruffle the serenity of her lord and master, who, according to that same Countess's description, was as different when angry from what he was when he was pleased, as the rippling sea on a summer's day near the sunny shore is from the mountainous and foaming alternation of coal-black hill and valley in the wide and boundless ocean,—her great object was to carry the point of being present at her father's marriage, for that she knew was *his* point; and, weak or strong, what mattered to *her*, since it was the desire of a parent,—the only one she had ever known, to whom her love was devoted, as was his to her.

Therefore did she content herself with the gracious permission to go to the wedding, and followed up the somewhat questionable consent of Mortimer by touching upon the details, as to whom they should go; whether they should go to Grosvenor Street, or to an hotel, or —

“Oh,” said Mortimer, “there is time enough for all that: say we will be there.”

The words were music to her ear.

—“ As to the precise time, or the particular place, that shall be determined hereafter : but mind you, Helen, you are to consider that this infraction of my rule — never to subject myself to an association with your extraordinary uncle Jacob — is to be held by you as a special grace and favour.”

Saying which, he drew his Helen to his bosom, and gave her one of those kisses of affection and devotion which go direct to a heart anxious to have the feelings with which it is overflowing, appreciated.

After this conversation and consent, Helen was as nearly happy as she could be so long as the Countess remained at Sadgrove.

One can hardly picture the delight with which she sat down in the morning to describe to her father, in an affectionate letter, the ready acquiescence of Mortimer in his wishes, and to enquire into the particulars, as to whether there would be accommodation for them in Grosvenor Street, whether he meant or wished them to go to his house, and, in fact, touching every point relative to the “ exhibition ” which,

knowing her volatile parent's character and disposition, she felt perfectly assured he was anxious to make.

As to the proceedings of the vivacious bridegroom elect, they were most prosperous. No sooner had Jacob opened the subject to Mrs. Catling in his own peculiar manner, the abruptness and oddity of which saved a world of trouble and an age of time, it was quite charming to see how readily she acquiesced in his suggestions. This was natural enough; for, besides being really very much prepossessed in favour of Jack, and feeling a sort of general anxiety to be married again and brought forward in the world, she had been taught to consider old Jacob in the light rather of an absolute monarch than an ordinary trustee, and to measure his importance and influence by the confidence which her late spouse had reposed in him, and the extent of power over her with which he had invested him.

In the association of Jack and his intended, during the short space which intervened between the beginning and the ending of their

“courtship,” there was nothing sufficiently romantic to render the details interesting to a third person, or rather a fourth; for, during their walkings, and drivings, and shoppings, they were generally accompanied by “sister Margaret.” At this brief season and its events we shall, therefore, take only a hasty glance, although it is necessary that the reader should know how delighted John was with Mortimer’s acceptance of his invitation to the wedding, a circumstance to him of first-rate importance. The announcement of his gracious intention to be present was received by Jacob with one of his most uncourteous grunts, and a hearty declaration that, “come, or stay away, it was all one to him.”

The title which has been selected for the narrative now before the reader will naturally have led him to anticipate the occurrence of several of those events and ceremonies by which the three principal epochs of a life are distinguished; and therefore he will not be disposed to quarrel with the writer for shortening the details of the second “marriage,” which it becomes

his duty here to record. Certain circumstances connected with it, however, are perhaps worthy of remark.

The preliminaries were, as the reader sees, very soon arranged: the gaiety and vivacity of Jack were the theme of the widow's admiration and praise, and the little dinners in Grosvenor Street, which, by degrees, two or three of his dearest friends were allowed to join *en petit comité*, were quite charming; and Lady Bembridge came and made the *aimable*; and Miss Rouncivall and Miss Fitz-Flannery began to be friends; and all went on delightfully, Jacob having already handed over to his now happy brother one moiety of the promised thousand pounds. Just tipping Cupid's wings with gold, if the precious metal does not clog them, makes them flap most agreeably. The judicious application of even so small a sum as five hundred pounds, coming in time, makes a wonderful difference in the general aspect of affairs; and when Mrs. Catling returned to Shamrock Cottage, after passing an agreeable, or, what she called, an "elegant" evening at

the house of her intended,—which house, moreover, was intended for her, — she dreamed herself into a new region, and saw all her hopes of rising in the world on the point of realization.

In the mean time Jacob was doing the more important business connected with the affair. The worldly part of the arrangements, and the legal proceedings, were confided to the care of his faithful councillor, Brimmer Brassey, of Barnard's Inn, who, although the most agreeable of attorneys in his own estimation, was so odious in Jack's eyes, that he could scarcely endure a dialogue of ten minutes with him even when business required an hour. Brassey had the entire management of Jacob's concerns; and it had more than once struck Jack that a great deal of his brother's churlishness towards him arose from prejudices awakened in his mind by the attorney, whom he never could be prevailed upon to invite to Grosvenor Street, even although Jacob's hints that way tending had been by no means few or obscure.

“ I tell you why I like him,” said Jacob ;
“ he has a short, off-hand way of doing busi-

ness, after his own fashion ; no bills,—no running up,—no receiving instructions,—no consulting about this, or advising about that, or conversing about t'other ;— he does everything for me by the job. ‘ Brassey,’ says I, ‘ I want to do so and so ; — can I, or can’t I ? — How much will it cost ? ’ He says yes, or no, as the case may be, — fixes his price, — does it : I give him a cheque for the whole, and there’s an end.”

“ He seems quick,” said Jack.

“ Quick !—psha ! ” said Jacob ; “ lightning’s a slow coach to him ! See how he managed matters at Mudbury—and here, with all those settlements and things. Why, one of your fine tip-toppers would be a month haggling at three-and-four-pence a minute : not a bit of it with Brassey,—all done at a blow. I just give him the heads : — seven hundred and fifty per ann. ; — two hundred settled on self, — at death of husband, jointure from first marriage returns to her, in addition to whatever may be left ; — eh ? — All plane-sailing — no jiggamaree stuff ! *He* drew Catling’s will, don’t you see ? — knows

all the particulars. Well, now, for fifty pounds all that will be done, which, of course, I pay."

Jack bowed.

—"And what happens? — why, the day of the wedding, nothing remains but to sign the settlement, and all's safe. No worries, as I say, about references and consultations — does duty for both clients; I have known him, under the rose, act half-a-dozen times for plaintiff and defendant in the same cause; — it simplifies matters. Besides, when one *has* got hold of an honest lawyer — eh? — it's as well to keep him."

"I leave all this to you, brother," said Jack; "you have a longer head than I."

"You shall be taken care of," said Jacob. "I always take care of myself, — *you* don't. Brassey shall get all ready, and you will have nothing to do but sign; so, set your heart at rest."

Jack's delight at being relieved from any lengthened intercourse with Mr. Brimmer Brassey was great; but it was somewhat qualified

when Jacob suggested that it would be considered “uncommon rude” not to invite him to the *déjeuner*. Jack felt the strongest inclination to demur; but Jacob was so important a character in the drama about to be enacted, that he had not the courage to “speak up.”

“My reason for pressing it,” said Jacob, “is this: Brassey doesn’t think small beer of himself; and although, as far as he personally is concerned, I shouldn’t care three straws if he were hanged to-morrow, so that my accounts with him were all square,—which, please the pigs, they are every Saturday night,—I think it might give him a better idea of *me* to see me amongst the lords and chaps whom I despise, but whom he worships.”

“Oh!” said Jack, “there can be no difficulty about that: you know the invitations will all come from Teresa; but, I dare say, she will have no objection.”

“She!” said Jacob with a contemptuous sneer; — “no, I think not: *her* objections wouldn’t go for much with *me*; — I look to myself — eh? — that is *my* principle. What

I think right must be right with those who think it worth while to keep in with me ; and when I say worth while, you perceive, Jack, I am not such a bumpkin as to suppose that anybody *does* keep in with me but for what he can get. Catling, to be sure, did leave me a lump of money ; but then he had advances, at reasonable interest, during his life. If he hadn't paid me, somebody else would : he was but a noodle-pie after all — eh ?”

Jack never permitted himself to differ with Jacob ; and, as he certainly could not sympathize with him in feeling or principle, he allowed him to have it, as *he* called, “ all his own way.” He was quite sure that he was on the safe side while Jacob espoused his cause in the financial arrangements ; and, as the fact was truly stated by him, that the preparation of a marriage settlement, by the conditions of which the gentleman had nothing to give, and the lady all to confer, the said gentleman could lose very little if anything ; Jack conceded the point, and Mr. Brimmer Brassey, the ambidextrous attorney of Barnard's Inn, was commissioned

to do the whole business, although Jack had at the very moment resting upon a shelf in a leading and important solicitor's chamber in Lincoln's Inn one of those brown cannisters of which mention has elsewhere been made, upon which his name appeared painted in white letters, perfectly legal as to length under the last new act for regulating the descriptions of owners of carts, vans, and caravans, and which might have secured a dealer in "Marine Stores" from the penalty to be pounced upon by some pettifogging picker-up of pence in the shape of a common informer, in regard to the dimensions of the characters which over his door announce the character of the owner of the house. In fact, the isolated Jacob had succeeded in establishing a kind of dogged influence over everybody around him, — certainly not obtained by conciliation or fair means, — which had the effect of putting down all opposition to his will, unless it happened, as it had occurred in the case of Mortimer, that his subjects rose into open rebellion and threw off the yoke altogether.

However, it must be confessed that everything looked smilingly, as far as the union of John and Teresa—the Christian names make it sound more romantic—was concerned; and it was this perfect accordance and harmony of all things in concatenation accordingly, which so completely divested it of real interest. Jack did nothing but laugh; Teresa, as they called her, laughed from morning till night; and Margaret couldn't answer the commonest question without bursting into a fit of noisy mirthfulness: even Jacob chuckled, Mr. Brimmer Brassey tittered, and the infection became so general, that Mr. Grub, the head, chief, and confidential clerk, could scarcely keep his countenance seriously inclined while regulating the ledger in Lilypot Lane.

All this certainly was heterodox; for it seems an established axiom in society that a "merry wedding" should be as melancholy a ceremony as possible, in which tears are to predominate.

In the midst of all the arrangements, Jack was particularly anxious that Colonel Magnus

should also be present at the “nuptial ceremony;” not only because he was somebody in *his* way, but because he was the chosen and particular friend of Mortimer: not but, if he had known the real truth, he might have felt less disposed to cultivate or cherish his acquaintance, since the first important difference that had ever arisen between him and Mortimer occurred upon the particular point of Helen’s marriage. Fortunately for the world, its inhabitants are not omniscient; and Jack took Magnus for what he seemed to be, and held that he would be ornamental as one of the party.

“I guess,” said Mr. Brimmer Brassey, as he was sitting after dinner at Shamrock Cottage with Jacob and his brother, — for *there* John Batley was forced to endure him, — “I guess, as the Americans say, that Colonel Magnus won’t show: his paper is a good deal about. I think, — only, of course, we professional men say nothing except where we are not ourselves concerned, — I have seen his name in queer places: and I think that, although he

ought to be in his own country, he is on the other side of the Channel."

"What!" said Jacob, "hard up?"

"Chock, block, and belay, sir," said Brassey. "I heard of his having been at Worcester only a fortnight ago trying to raise some money, — I think I could guess by whose assistance; but, of course, I say nothing: — no harm done to anybody, for he couldn't do it."

Jack was perfectly convinced that Brassey was right as to the period of his visit to that city, and also of his return in company with him to London; and thence concluded that his facts were in all probability equally accurate.

"I know," said Batley, "he was at Worcester at the time you mention, for I saw him there with my son-in-law, and came up to town with him myself."

"Ah!" said Brassey, putting his finger archly to his nose, "that's just it, sir! I keep my eye upon him, for I am concerned for one or two establishments where he is dipped

a good deal; and, by not hearing from him lately, we are fearful he will fall into bad hands, and get into the X, Y, Z line."

"Brassey," said Jacob, acting as interpreter, "Brassey means, into the hands of advertising money-lenders."

"I see," said Jack, not without a sort of unpleasant feeling of consciousness that he was in the company of a gentleman who, from the nature of his calling, and the general course of his practice, might have seen *his* name in some of the places in which that of Colonel Magnus had figured; "but I understood that Colonel Magnus was a man of considerable property."

"Probably you heard himself describe it," said Brassey, who, as all vulgar-minded men invariably do, grew familiar and impudent as he warmed with his subject. "Great talkers, Mr. Batley, are the least doers; and those who flourish most in words, are the least flourishing in fact. No: depend upon it, you will not get him to the breakfast or dinner, or whatever it may be."

“ I had no idea,” said John, “ that the case was so bad.”

“ Nor anybody else,” said Brassey, “ but we, sir,—we who know and see, and work the wires that make the puppets dance. Lord bless you ! I could show you such things about your tip-topping friend — only, of course, *we* of the profession are sealed,—as would astonish you.”

Jack, who had always hated Brassey, began to find his aversion gradually increase as the man’s familiarity progressed, and already he had satisfied himself that his first impression of his character was the just one ; nor did he altogether rely upon his own judgment, for he had mentioned his name to his own solicitors, and they had, without descending to particulars, sufficiently corroborated the prepossession he entertained in his disfavour. The high, the honourable, and the respectable solicitors of London are as completely the antipodes of the skulking, sneaking, jobbing, dirty attorneys, as the *elite* of St. George’s, Hanover Square, are of the worthy inhabitants of New

Zealand ; so that every sentence Mr. Brimmer Brassey uttered, reduced him one step in Jack's estimation.

It is said that there never was a book published which did not contain something worthy of notice ; it may be that there does not exist a man from whose conversation something valuable in the way of information may not be extracted. Hating and despising Mr. Brassey as John Batley did, he had certainly received an enlightenment from him upon the subject of Colonel Magnus's circumstances which was at once curious and interesting. With all his activity of mind, his thoughts had never taken *that* turn ; and when he became the companion of the Colonel in his journey to London, he certainly did not entertain the slightest suspicion that his removal eastward from Worcester was the result of the failure of an attempt to raise a sum of money in that city upon Mortimer's credit : nor, to say truth, did he feel at all obliged to Brassey for the enlightenment he had afforded him upon the subject ; on the contrary, the flippancy of manner in which he

spoke of Magnus, and his alleged pecuniary connexion with Mortimer, in direct violation of that sort of confidence which forms an essential part of the compact between lawyer and client, disgusted him; for although Magnus might not have been in direct communication with Brassey, it was perfectly evident that he had become familiar with the state of his circumstances, and the course of his proceedings, by some professional intercourse with those who had.

As the evening, or rather afternoon, advanced, and Mr. Brassey "passed the bottle," which he did with surprising activity, he became more lively and loquacious, and proportionably more odious to Jack. He described at length the pleasures of a weekly dinner of a convivial club, as he called it, to which he belonged, where there was always a remarkably good "spread," and where, he ventured to say, they had the best port wine in the parish; and where Bob Simmons and Tom Watkins used to sing the drollest songs after dinner; and then, at

nine, the smoking began ; and then — and so he went on, until Jacob, taking fire at the mention of smoking, rang the bell for some cigars, and some punch, and Jack made his escape to his intended.

Hapless swain ! little did he anticipate that his fair Teresa would be ordered by her obdurate trustee to prepare with her own hands the beverage he loved so much. As Mrs. Catling the wife of his friend, she had been taught to compound it according to an approved recipe ; and, as Mrs. Catling the widow, he expected her to continue her services. Jack, of course, bore all this philosophically ; and while his intended was gone to the fulfilment of what she really seemed to consider her bounden duty, he and Margaret remained talking over Mr. Brimmer Brassey, who, it seemed, was more than half convinced that the said Miss Margaret was in love with him,—which, if it be true that women endeavour to conceal their affection by abusing the object of their devotion, he could not have doubted for a

moment, after having heard the young lady's analysis of his extraordinary merits and perfections.

Batley had a sharpish battle to fight with his pride, which revolted against what he considered not only a great want of consideration for his feelings on the part of Jacob, but a positive degradation of his intended wife in the eyes of the establishment. The idea of the future mistress of the mansion in Grosvenor Street being compelled to "make punch," and, in order to do it *secundum artem*, to retire to the butler's pantry,—was so revolting that it was with difficulty he smothered his indignation, and endeavoured to divert himself with tumbling about the contents of Margaret's work-box, over which, in order to exhibit at once her industry and "gentility," she was busying herself about nothing: but it cost him an effort. To be sure, a few days would change the whole arrangement,—and Jacob was omnipotent, and he had only yet got the moiety of his thousand pounds, and had not yet secured the lady; and therefore must he

patiently endure what was exceedingly galling : and as the infliction was perfectly characteristic of his brother's unmitigated selfishness, he resolved to put a good face on " the business," and seem entirely satisfied with what was going on.

The nectarious compound having been judiciously concocted, and then deposited on the table by the hands of the fair widow herself, who uniformly acted Hebe upon such occasions, she joined Jack and her sister in the other room, leaving the bear and the boar to revel in all the luxuries of smoking and tippling, while the more refined portion of the party were enjoying the calmer delights of coffee and conversation, alternately sipping and gossiping till the little clock on the chimney-piece that never went right, struck ten.

" Well, Mr. Brassey," said Jacob, knocking away the burnt end of his cigar, " you have read over the draft of the settlement to Mrs. C. ? "

" Does a duck swim ? " said Brassey, giving forth a puff which would have made the funnel of a steam-boat jealous.

“ And she”——

“—Is, as she always is,” said the attorney-at-law with a smirk, “ quite agreeable. I am not surprised. Your brother, Mr. Batley, is uncommon pleasant,—easy to deal with,—no buckram,—a great favourite with the sex, no doubt; and what I call quite the gentleman.”

“ Umph! that ’s it,” said Jacob; “ and a very fine gentleman too, as I always tell him.”

“ I ’m afraid,” said Brassey, giving another puff, “ that Mr. Mortimer will get entangled with Colonel Magnus,—eh, sir?—there ’s something going on in the accepting and indorsing line.”

“ I don’t care three brass farthings what happens to *him*, or anybody else,” said Jacob. “ He is another fine gentleman,—a fine race, eh?—friends as they call themselves,—I always knew how these matters would end,— what do I care?”

“ No,” said Brassey, “ I don’t see why you should, sir;”—he always called Jacob “sir;”—“ only I was thinking something might be done in the way of business with the kites that

are flying ; — I shouldn't mind dabbling a bit ; besides, it might be of use to the parties."

" Never you mind that," said Jacob, filling his glass : " take my advice,—put yourself out of your way for nobody, nobody will ever put himself out of his way for *you* ; stick to your six-and-eightpences, that's your mark. You have read the settlement over to Jack too ?"

" Of course," said Brassey, " and he is equally pleased with the lady."

" Well done !" said Jacob, " that's something : there, you see, I please two people by pleasing myself ; — all comes to that, — eh ? Now, Brassey, another glass ? this is very pretty tippie. We shall shift our quarters to Grosvenor Street soon, — nearer at hand than this London-gone-out-of-town place ; that's one of my objects : I shall get my Sunday dinner without having so far to go for it."

" Colonel Mortimer is coming to the wedding," said Brassey, in a tone which implied his knowledge of the fact, although he was merely fishing.

" So I hear," said Jacob ; " and of course

his wife. I would rather she was coming by herself."

"I hear, sir," said Brassey, "that Mrs. M. is in the way which ladies wish to be who love their lords."

"What way is that?" said Jacob: "hang me, if I believe any ladies love their lords now-a-days; but Mortimer isn't a lord."

"No," said Brimmer; "what I said is a delicate allusion out of a play, sir. I meant, that Mrs. Mortimer is—as I hear—in the family way, sir."

"Oh, ah," said Jacob, "very likely; I'm sure *I* don't care; I suppose the live stock of the world must be kept up, and it's all very right: I haven't heard anything about it, and can't say; it's nothing very remarkable any way."

A pause followed the ungracious snub which Jacob had inflicted upon Brassey.

"Have you managed about the carriage for me?" said Jacob, after having taken two or three puffs.

"All settled, sir," said Brassey; "Mr.

Perch will take the old one at the price named, and two years' credit for the new one."

"Right!" said Jacob, "money is money; and I see no use in keeping a chariot in a coach-house to wear itself out: besides, there's the interest for the two years. That's a good bargain — eh? — for *me* at least. Monday, I shall hand Jack over the other five hundred pounds — get *that* off my mind — nothing to repent of there; — and when are the things to be engrossed?"

"Three days will do the needful, sir," said Brassey.

"I have nothing to do with the stamps," said Jacob.

"Nothing, sir," replied the attorney; "and on the wedding-day we will sign, seal, and deliver."

"Just so," said Jacob; "and I'll tell you what" —

What that was, the reader is not at this moment doomed to know, inasmuch as the servant entered the room at the instant to enquire whether Mr. Batley would like to have any

cold meat, or broiled bones, or anything to wind up the evening.

“ Odds bobs ! ” said Jacob, “ what ! is it getting late enough to ask that question ? No,—nothing—nothing more to eat.—Is tea over ? ”

“ A long while ago, sir,” said the man. “ My mistress’s compliments, would you like a little more punch ? ”

“ What d’ye say, Brassey,—eh ? ” said Jacob ;
“ warm it up again,—eh ? ”

Brassey inclined his head and smirked, as much as to say with Bombastes in the tragedy,

“ Whate’er your majesty shall deign to name,

“ Short-cut, or long, to me ’tis all the same.”

“ As you please, sir.”

“ A leetle more, William,” said Jacob ;
“ about half as much as before ; and—d’ye hear ?—put it in the drawing-room with two clean glasses ; we ’ll go and sit there,—the fire is getting low.”

William obeyed.

“ Shan’t we disturb the lovers, sir ? ” said Brassey, with an arch look.

“ Lovers ! ” said Jacob, making a face

“ Pooh, pooh ! Mr. B. what have they to talk of that we mayn’t hear ? Why, the one’s a widow, and the other, according to your account, very near being a grandfather—hey ? No—no, come along ; I dare say Jack won’t dislike our interruption : if he does, I can’t help it ; I can’t let myself get cold to please anybody : so come—let us move.”

And move they accordingly did : nor was their appearance in the drawing-room in the slightest degree annoying to the Philander of the evening, who, with all his resolution to be pleased with the widow, found it rather a toil to keep the conversation going.

This discovery did not much disconcert him, inasmuch as he had seen numerous examples of domestic happiness in cases where the intellectuality of the wife ranked vastly below that of the husband : nor did he entirely disapprove of the principle of unbending and relaxing his mind, when quiet and at home, by bringing it to the level of that of his fair partner,—not altogether losing sight of the satisfaction to be derived from a consciousness of superiority

over a companion in whose eyes he wished to appear something better than the common run of men.

Mr. Brassey, a little elevated by his potations, brushed up his greasy hair, and seated himself next Miss Fitz-Flannery, who had been again reduced to the task of doing the honours, and making herself agreeable, in consequence of Jacob's second demand upon the services of her sister. His conversation upon this occasion was made up of enquiries whether Miss F.-F. had lately been at the theatre, whether she had seen Mr. Tidmarsh in *Othello*, and what she thought of Miss Pumpkin in *Juliet*, and a lamentation that the "fair sex" could not be members of the Slap-bang club to which he belonged, where he was sure Miss F. would be delighted with the singing after supper.

When Jack's carriage was announced, Jacob engaged places for himself and his legal adviser; it could set Jack home first, and then take him to Lilypot Lane, dropping Brassey at Barnard's Inn. The arrangement was par-

ticularly inconvenient to Batley, who had no intention of going home so early; but, as Jacob's will was law, all was done according to his bidding, and, at about a quarter past eleven o'clock, the triumvirate took their departure from Shamrock Cottage.

CHAPTER VI.

It must not be supposed that, during the period which had elapsed since Mortimer's marriage, his exemplary sister had ceased to watch with nervous solicitude the course of his proceedings. She was indeed, and in every sense of the word, exemplary; and the love she bore her brother was the real cause of the dread and apprehension of which she could not divest herself as to the happy issue of his second marriage. The correspondence between them had ceased; but, without adopting any unfair means of ascertaining the real state of their domestic affairs, Mrs. Farnham was not without information as regarded the proceedings at Sadgrove: one of its visitors, was an old friend of hers; and from *her*, during her stay there, she learned enough to render her

extremely anxious for the future happiness and respectability of her brother.

It appeared to Mrs. Farnham, from all she could hear, that the position of her new sister-in-law in society was one the least in the world calculated to secure her from what the politician would call "the pressure from without." She had received descriptions of her character and disposition from one who had known her from childhood, and who was fully alive to the peculiarities of her temper, which, although based upon high principle and uncompromising candour, seemed, in her eyes, fearfully conducive, at some period of excitement, to dissolve the bond of union which held her to Mortimer, whose temper so far resembled that of his wife, that, the moment he fancied that efforts were making to deceive or delude him, his rage, amounting to frenzy, would know no bounds.

Mortimer was conscious of his own weakness; and never did man struggle more earnestly, even at the sacrifice of bodily health, against the workings of his mind, than he did :

but informed, as his sister was, of Helen's independence of spirit and impatience of control, her apprehensions were the more awakened to the future peril of their happiness by the circumstance that Helen had no real female friend, — no experienced councillor, who might not only by advice but example point out to her the course of conduct by which she might even conciliate, and so eventually reform, the husband who had sought in his marriage with her, the restoration of his peace of mind, and a gradual oblivion of his past indiscretions. On the contrary, having been brought up without a mother, placed early in the control of her father's house, and accustomed to associate with his companions, she had, as has already been remarked, no female friends whose advice she could seek, or whose counsel she could adopt; and, as if to make this evil the greater, her husband had supplied the place of such an associate by domesticating in his house the Countess St. Alme.

Why he did so, Mrs. Farnham could not imagine; but when, in reply to her disin-

terested and earnest remonstrances upon the point, she received a harsh and unkind answer, she ceased to press a matter upon which she was plainly told her interference was not required ; that Mortimer was master of his own actions and of his own house, and that, so long as that was the case, he did not feel disposed either to ask or accept advice as to the regulation of his conduct ; that it was sufficient for his sister to know that the Countess was one of his oldest friends to induce her to denounce her ; and that, since she had refused to do him the honour to afford Helen her countenance and friendship when he had expressed the warmest wish that she should do so, he must beg to be left unmolested in the pursuit of the course which, under the circumstances, he had considered it best and wisest to pursue.

If ever the blindness of a man of the world were made evident, it exhibited itself in this proceeding of Mortimer. It is not at this moment our business to dive into all the particulars of the intimacy which subsisted between Mortimer and the Countess, nor to ascertain

the real cause of the influence over him which she unquestionably possessed : suffice it to say, that he knew her as a worldly woman, — an *intriguante*, — daring and insincere, — and that yet she had the power to make him believe that, from her perfect intimacy with all the circumstances of his former marriage, as well as with the peculiarities of his own character, she was, of all persons in the world, the one to soften down any difficulties which might arise in the progressive developement of the truths connected with his former attachment, and accustom Helen to the occasional gloominesses and exacerbations of temper to which he was subject, and which had their origin in the recollections which her sweet influence was destined to overcome.

How the Countess fulfilled the task, we have seen ; why she acted as she did, we have yet to learn : but, let her motives have been what they might, their results were not unknown to Mrs. Farnham, who began to repent, when she felt it was too late, that she had sacrificed to friendship and a feeling of distaste, which she

now thought she ought to have overcome, the chance of securing her brother's happiness.

She had even heard the intelligence to which Mr. Brimmer Brasseÿ had so "genteelly" referred at Shamrock Cottage, which encreased the interest she felt in her sister-in-law, and led her to look forward to the period when the attentions of one so nearly connected with her as she was, might be most valuable to Helen: in fact, she repented of having withstood her brother's invitation, and resolved to overlook the harshness of his last reply, in the hope of rescuing those who were dear to her from a fate which she considered inevitable, if the visit, and consequent power, of the Countess St. Alme, were permitted to continue. This design the amiable Mrs. Farnham lost but little time in putting into execution. She wrote to Francis, and told him that her friend and family had resolved to visit England earlier than they had at first intended; that she proposed accompanying them; and, having therefore faithfully fulfilled her engagement to them, she should be too happy

to offer herself for a visit to Sadgrove for as long or as short a period as he and Helen might choose to fix.

—“ And,” added she, “ tell your young and beautiful wife, for so I hear she is, that I shall press her to my heart with the feelings of a mother rather than a sister. The difference between your age and mine, dear Francis, has always given me a sort of semi-maternal authority over you ; and, as Helen is still *your* junior, why may I not cherish a sentiment towards her which will necessarily involve that care and those attentions which, at no great distance of time, may probably be acceptable to her? Bid her think of me, then, as if I were the parent she has lost ; and do you, dear Francis, teach her to love me as you think I deserve to be loved by one who is so nearly and dearly allied to you.”

Francis read his sister's letter. He threw it from him.

“ This,” muttered he to himself, “ is trick, — artifice, — design. Some tattling gossip-monger has been plying her with news of my

misconduct; or else she thinks me incapable of preserving my own honour and reputation without *her* assistance. It is evident her opinions are changed; she is willing *now* to come to Sadgrove, — ready *now* to do that, which a few months since I vainly implored her to do. She finds that I will not endure her literary lectures, and so has resolved to settle herself here to preach them personally. No, no! — all that I sought to do has been done: Helen knows the whole of the history, which I feared might startle her, and heeds it not. Emily would undo all this: — if it had been her pleasure to come to me in the outset, — but no, — not now: she then inflicted a wound which this offer cannot cure. Nay, she herself has pleaded in the strongest terms against the very course she now proposes to adopt, by fixing herself for an indefinite term in my family to act the part of mother to my wife, when her own letters distinctly deprecate such a system, and uphold the undivided dominion of the mistress of the house as "——

Mortimer's thoughts glanced towards the

Countess, who, in fact, was playing the very part which Mrs. Farnham proposed to undertake, but in a very different manner, and with very different motives. His sister had warned him of this intimacy, — had even expressed her disbelief in the possibility of its existence : the intimacy continued. Was it not that very circumstance which had induced her to alter her resolution of remaining abroad ? — was it not that, which had roused her to take a step unpleasant and inconvenient to herself ? It was perfectly certain that the Countess St. Alme and Mrs. Farnham could not meet ; the very acceptance of her proposal would be the signal for the immediate removal of the other ; the Countess being sufficiently a woman of the world, even if she had not been made acquainted with Mrs. Farnham's feelings towards her by her brother, to render any explanations of whys and wherefores unnecessary upon such an occasion : the tacit understanding being, on the part of Mrs. Farnham, that, if the Countess did not go, she would not

come ; and, on the part of the Countess, that Mrs. Farnham would not come if she did not go.

Francis gave the letter a second perusal ; and then (a circumstance which may pretty well explain the course of affairs at Sadgrove) proceeded to the morning-room, where his wife and the Countess were sitting, and handed the despatch *to the latter* to read.

“ An offer of a visit, Helen,” said Mortimer to his wife. “ I will give you leave to guess from whom.”

Helen, seeing that the letter, the contents of which the Countess was eagerly devouring, in all probability announced the fact, felt somewhat startled by being permitted to surmise about an event which was so regularly and *officially* confided to his guest.

“ I cannot imagine,” said Helen : — “ not my father ? ”

“ No,” said Mortimer, “ not exactly ; but from a lady who is good enough to wish to perform the part of mother to you. I suppose she imagines that you are not able to take care

of yourself, and that I am not able to take care of you."

"Who is that?" said Helen. "I was not aware that there was anybody in the world sufficiently interested in my proceedings to take such pains in my behalf."

"The lady is no other than my most reverend, grave, and potent sister," said Mortimer, — "a lady who has the quality of acidulating everything she approaches; who looks upon everybody as doomed to eternal destruction who does not act up to what she considers propriety, rectitude, virtue, &c. &c. &c., and is the completest wet blanket that ever was thrown upon the warmth of a domestic fire-side."

"Mrs. Farnham!" said Helen, — and the tone in which she repeated the name was not exactly in accordance with the sketch which Mortimer had drawn of her. Helen had heard her spoken of in the highest terms; and even the Countess herself, who hated her, had taught Helen to understand that the real cause of her sister-in-law's absence from England and the wedding was a scrupulous sensitive-

ness with regard to Mortimer's former errors, and a nervous doubtfulness of the success of his scheme of reformation; so that, although Helen had been taught to fear, and even dislike her, by the Countess, she had learned from other reports, — probably enough, from the very friend who had communicated to *her* the details of what was passing at Sadgrove, — to respect and revere her.

—“ And *will* she come ? ” said Helen, feeling at the moment a fervent hope that she might ; more especially since her opinion of the protracted, or rather continued, stay of the St. Almes, was no longer a secret from Mortimer.

“ I should think not,” said Mortimer : — “ how should she ? We shall go to France in December, and she does not propose coming to England until the end of November.”

“ Do you really mean to go to France ? ” said Helen, wishing to be informed as to the strength of his resolution.

“ So the Countess says,” said Mortimer.

“ What does the Countess say ? ” said the Countess herself, laying down the letter.

“That we are to be your guests at Christmas,” said Mortimer.

“I understand it as settled,” was the lady’s remark; “but perhaps Mrs. Farnham’s pilgrimage may alter your determination. Do not let us interfere with her pious proceedings.”

“May *I* see the letter?” said Helen, with an air of humility not quite so well acted as her surprise at the fishing-temple.

“Have you finished it?” said Mortimer carelessly to the Countess.

“Oh! yes, *I* have done with it,” replied the lady, tossing it to him across the table.

“Then,” said Helen, “I presume I *may* see it.”

All that had passed between her and Mortimer on the subject of the Countess, (much more than the Countess herself suspected,) flashed into the minds of both husband and wife; but Helen struggled successfully with her feelings, and took the letter to read, as a matter of course, and thus escaped the sight of an interchange of looks between Francis and

their lively guest, the character of which would have excited any other than pleasurable feelings in her bosom.

“ I suppose,” said the Countess, with a pert toss of her head, “ we are bound to make way for your sister, Mortimer ; and that not only we must retreat, but you must abandon your intention of visiting us, to receive her.”

“ I have *said*, Countess,” replied Mortimer, “ we are engaged to *you*.”

“ But why,” said Helen, putting down the letter for a moment, “ is it necessary that one engagement should destroy the other ? Is there any reason why you should not receive your sister before the Count and Countess leave us, and then we might go ?”

“ No,” said Mortimer, “ that wouldn’t answer.” — And Helen *did* see the look at the Countess which followed this declaration.

“ But wouldn’t you like that Mrs. Farnham should come here ?” asked Helen. “ I am sure her letter is full of kindness and good feeling.”

“ Yes,” said the Countess, “ she is all kind-

ness to those who happen to come up to her notions of propriety and rectitude ; but her benevolence is extremely circumscribed. I believe I am not upon her list as one of those who can be preserved from destruction, merely because I do when in Rome as Rome does, and have been guilty of going to a play on Sunday in society where it is thought no sin, or of violating every tie of morality by making a *parti* at *Ecarté* after the said play was over. I know she thinks me a most abominable person."

Helen looked at the lady, and felt the force of the contrast which the words then glibly flowing over her roseate lips, afforded to those contained in her sister-in-law's letter ; but she saw that Mortimer was determined upon his course of proceeding, and that the lively Countess's influence would prohibit the visit of the amiable widow.

This circumstance weighed heavily upon her mind. She appreciated the kindness and affection which evidently had prompted Mrs. Farnham's forgiveness of Mortimer's previous letters to her ; and, anticipating the troubles

and difficulties which she really was destined to encounter, dwelt painfully upon the decision which would deprive her of the society and support of so amiable a being. It was, however, all of no use. The answer to Emily Farnham's offer was brief and almost harsh, conceived in the spirit which dictated her brother's first remarks upon it when he received it, and couched in terms little more civilized or considerate.

It was impossible for Helen not to be conscious of the triumphant air which the Countess assumed when it was ascertained that this refusal had been given, or, in fact, that *her* power had outweighed that of the woman she detested, and whom Mortimer ought to have loved; and for the next two or three days she joked Helen on the possibility of doing without her volunteer Mamma, who was probably more anxious to assume the character in jest, from never having filled it in earnest. Nor was Helen better satisfied, than she was with this *playfulness*, by seeing that it pleased her husband, who seemed to seize every opportunity

of supporting the Countess in running down the amiable qualities of his nearest relative.

Time, however, wore on, and the day of Batley's marriage drew near. The question was, whether the St. Almes should remain at Sadgrove during the absence of its owner and his lady, or that they should all break up, and remain in London for a week or two, until they should take flight for France; an event which depended chiefly upon the emancipation of young Blocksford from his labours at the university: and it must be admitted that, pending the discussion, Mrs. Mortimer leant very much to the latter scheme. She felt that, quitting her house, and leaving her establishment under the control of a lady for whom, whatever her feelings might be, her affection certainly did not encrease, was something like a degradation, and a practical admission of her superiority, and even a sort of admission of ownership, which every action of the lady herself tended to assume. As for Mortimer, he appeared totally to have forgotten all that had passed on the subject, and seemed, less from inclination, or

even regard for the Countess, than from some indescribable power which she had over him, to become fascinated—in the real rattle-snake sense of the word—by her looks, and subside into a passive obedience to her will, which even his earnest desire to conciliate his wife, and calm her apprehensions, was not sufficiently strong to counteract.

A new difficulty, however, arose out of this affair, inasmuch as the Countess, who had a great fancy for “patronizing,” and who, reckoning upon her “title,” such as it was, imagined that she gave *éclat* to whatever she condescended to sanction; or rather, perhaps, one might say, that she wished it to be thought that she thought so; and, therefore, as soon as the arrangements for their all going to town were in a state of forwardness, she addressed herself in some of her sweetest tones to Helen, and, dressing her vivacious countenance in its brightest smiles, suggested that, as they should be in London at the time of her father’s marriage, she should be extremely happy to attend, if he felt that it would be agreeable;

“for,” added she, “he is a very charming person, and I wish him all sorts of happiness; and besides, Helen dear, he is *your* father.”

Now it so chanced, that in a letter from her father, that very morning received by Helen, in answer to one which she had written, speaking of the probability of going to town *en masse*, he had written thus :

“One worry appears to me probable from the general dispersion of your party, and its general movement upon London,—I mean as relates to the Countess St. Alme. She will, I suppose, naturally expect to be invited to the wedding, and I would not have her there upon any consideration. I have engaged the best of the few folks who happen to be in town, or passing through it; and, although I have no doubt of her amiability, and sociability, and utility, and all other ilities in the world, there *are* people who carry their dislike of her so far as to consider being brought in contact with her an offence. It would be the most unpleasant thing in the world to have anything of that sort happen upon such an occasion; and yet

how can I exclude her, unless by some extraordinary bit of good luck they should be engaged? Try to manage this; for, I declare to you, I cannot have them with anything like comfort to myself."

The lady's expression of her gracious intention to honour the *noces et festin* with her presence, coming so immediately after Jack's decided declaration of the impossibility of receiving her, was a sad puzzle for Helen, who dared not call her husband into council, inasmuch as she was perfectly assured the whole history would be told to the St. Almes, and in all probability would induce Mortimer to decline being present himself.

"I am sure," said Helen, "Papa will be too happy, if his arrangements are not all made. I believe the party will be very small, and confined entirely to relations."

"Oh dear no," said the Countess, "I have heard of half a dozen people who have been invited, and I believe it is to be as gay a thing as the time of year will permit: however, don't bore yourself about it; I will write to your

papa myself, and tell him how ready I shall be to witness his happiness."

"Do," said Helen, hoping by this means at least to shift the responsibility of getting rid of her to her volatile parent; "you will hear what he says."

"I should think," said the Countess, tossing her head in a manner peculiar to herself, "he can say but *one* thing.—It is not often I volunteer myself."

And so this brief colloquy terminated, it appearing to poor Helen that every succeeding day and hour entangled her more and more in difficulties, from which she ought, in point of fact, to have been perfectly free; and she proceeded to her boudoir to write an account of what had passed, to "Pappy," recommending the management of the matter to his care and discretion.

This incident in itself was trifling, and perhaps, let the results be what they may, would have been hardly worth recording, except as showing the perilous state in which Helen was placed. The wish of her father confidentially

expressed, she dared not communicate in confidence to her husband, under the apprehension that that confidence would be broken in favour of the woman in whose society she was forced to live, and the power of whose influence she was daily and hourly made to feel,—and yet without any show of unkindness on the part of her husband, who seemed to think the domestication of the Countess in his house as much a matter of course as that of his wife.

Little did Batley dream of the actual state of affairs at Sadgrove: indeed, the active preparations for his own happiness superseded all other matters, and the payment of the second moiety of Jacob's liberal gift put him so completely at his ease in the way of outfit, that Grosvenor Street looked gayer than ever. A second seasonable application of two or three hundred pounds brightened the prospect, and the smiles of the fair widow amply repaid him for all the trouble and expense which were bestowed upon the repairings and refittings to render his *bijou* of a residence worthy of her reception.

When, however, Jack received his daughter's letter, which came by the same post as the Countess's offer of patronizing his nuptials, he was, as the saying goes, "struck all of a heap." What was to be done? a man of the world in a dilemma is a moving sight; and see what the consequences to him would be arising from this *contretemps*! Besides several extremely respectable persons, the Bishop who was to marry him, and his wife and one of his daughters, had promised to breakfast with them; and the Countess St. Alme was no company for lawn sleeves. This he knew; but if he did know it, and knew that it was only in a very few places she was tolerated, he ought long before to have sacrificed every feeling but one, to have objected against Mortimer's retaining her as a constant visiter in the house of his daughter. Then, besides this, if he now evaded her visit, having before tacitly admitted her respectability, &c. what would *she* say?—what would Mortimer say?

He had certainly so far committed himself to Helen as to beg and hope she might not be

of the party, but he had given no specific reason, nor perhaps could he have given any ; but it was not a question of morality, or propriety, or even of virtue or vice, that worried him now, — it was how the thing was to be managed so as to offend nobody. Nobody hears names at parties, and the Countess's person was by no means well known in London, therefore it might all pass off quietly ; and even if, through the officiousness of the Butler or Gunter, the names of the Count and Countess St. Alme *did* creep into the Morning Post, there they would be together, husband and wife,—and what more could the most fastidious of mankind or woman-kind require ?—At all events, it seemed impossible to avert the blow ; and so away went a letter to the lady, full of delight and happiness, and “ nothing could be so kind, and nothing could make him so happy as presenting his amiable Teresa to her ; and nobody could be so charmed to have the honour of making her acquaintance,” and so on ; and these honied words travelled side by side in the Sadgrove bag with a brief but animated scrawl to Helen, depicting all

the parental miseries and anxieties in terms alternately the most glowing and most pathetic.

What a world it is ! Further on in our narrative we shall perhaps take occasion, even with respect to the family whose affairs chiefly demand our notice, to let the principal actors in the domestic drama stand forth and speak for themselves under circumstances where their candour will be unquestionable : for the present we content ourselves with the rare specimens of worldly sincerity afforded us in the two letters despatched at the same time from Grosvenor Street to Sadgrove.

“ Well,” said the Countess gaily after luncheon, “ I have done what I said I should do, and have got my answer.”

“ From whom ?” said Mortimer, “ and about what ?”

“ Mr. Batley’s marriage,” replied the animated lady. “ I resolved to patronize it, wrote accordingly, and have received a most gracious reply : so we shall make an agreeable party of ourselves, let what may happen.”

“ I do not think,” said Mortimer, in a man-

ner indicative rather of grief than of any capacious disinclination to be present, "that shall be there."

"My dear Francis!" said Helen, "why, Pappy will break his heart if you disappoint him."

"*You* can go, dear Helen," answered Mortimer, in a tone of marked kindness; "it is *your* company he desires: we will all go to town, and you can make some commonplace excuse for *me*."

"I know," said Helen, "why you hesitate; it is on account of my poor ill-mannered uncle."

"No, Helen," said Mortimer; "to that I had made up my mind; but it is—in fact, I think these ceremonies tedious, and one always seems *de trop*, and—in fact, I dislike"—

"Well, then," said the Countess, "if Mortimer does not choose to go, *we* can go without him, and dear St. Alme here will take care of us both,—won't you, love?"

"Certainly, to be sure, *ma chere*," said the Count, "whatever you ask of me."

"I think," said Mortimer, "Helen had bet-

ter go alone ; she will naturally feel an interest in the marriage, and we can all be with Batley and his bride-elect, and dine with him the day before, and make the lady's acquaintance ; it is the ceremony I would avoid."

" And now, pray, let me ask why ?" said the Countess.

" Oh !" said Mortimer, " there is a fuss, — and worry, — and dressing in the morning, — and — in fact, I must decline it."

" But," said Helen, " my dear Francis, you promised"——

" Yes," said Mortimer ; " but your father is resolved to be so very fine, that a common good parish-priest will not suffice him, — he must have a bishop to tie the knot."

" What !" said the Countess, laughing, " are you frightened at a bishop ? What bishop may it be ?"

" The Bishop of Dorchester," said Mortimer, fixing his look on her animated countenance.

" And is he such a dragon of piety that you dare not face him ?" asked the lady in a laughing tone of voice : " I have no such fears.

What is the name of this most formidable prelate, — for, not living in England, I am not well informed as to English episcopacy ?”

“ His name,” said Mortimer, slowly and distinctly, without moving his eyes, which seemed riveted on hers, — “ his name is Sydenham.”

In an instant the whole expression of her countenance was changed ; its animation was gone ; a death-like paleness left the rouge on her cheeks a palpable pink, ghastly and unnatural ; she gazed with an unconscious stare upon Mortimer, who remained motionless in his seat before her, resting his chin upon his folded hands.

“ My dear Countess,” said Helen, starting up, “ surely you are very ill. What is the matter ? — Mortimer dear, what is it ? — Here, give her some water, Count.”

“ Yes,” said the Count, rising, and walking slowly to the table from which she had retired, and filling a glass of water, “ she is sometime often so when somsing is not to disgest.”

The look Mortimer cast upon the poor little man, expressed, to Helen’s perfect dissatisfac-

tion, that he was thoroughly aware how much of mind mingled in the lady's disorder.

She soon rallied, thanked Helen for her care, believed it was the heat of the room, and begged St. Alme to ring for her maid. All this was done; the bell was rung,—the maid came,—the Countess retired; she recovered,—dined at table, and was as lively as ever:—but she did *not* go to Mr. John Batley's wedding.

Nobody can doubt that these frequent developments of innumerable little somethings which she did not comprehend, had the effect of keeping Helen's mind in a constant state of unsettlement; but still, although sad fits of gloom occasionally affected Mortimer, she had no cause to complain of his conduct towards her; on the contrary, whenever he had exhibited any symptoms of a ruffled temper, she had been—unconsciously it will be admitted—to blame: but this last scene, taken in conjunction with her father's evident dismay at the Countess's approach, led her more than ever to feel the necessity of again urging upon her husband the necessity of relieving

her from an association, which, although the Countess, when she chose, was a delightful companion, she felt to be painful, unnatural, and disreputable ; although, of course, she knew nothing of the real cause of her sudden abandonment of her design about the wedding.

It is extraordinary with what ease and readiness people of the world contrive to find some excellent reason for suddenly changing their minds, when the alteration has become absolutely necessary. It was but two days after this affair that the Countess received a letter from her son at Oxford, in which, as she said, he reported himself so extremely unwell, that he had been advised to go off to Cheltenham ; that the advice of his physician had been sanctioned by his tutor ; and that he had taken his departure for that Montpelier of England, where, he trusted, his mother would contrive to come to visit him, if it were only for a few days.

Never did indisposition seem more sympathetic than that of mother and son in this in-

stance ; nor ever one more agreeable to all parties, who were perfectly aware that its character was not particularly dangerous : it relieved the St. Almes from the difficulty, whatever it might be, which hindered their being at Batley's marriage ; and it got rid of the awkwardness which Helen had somewhat forcibly dwelt upon to her husband, of leaving them in possession of Sadgrove during their absence. Thus were all their little asperities smoothed ; and the day that the Mortimers left home for London, the St. Almes took their departure for Cheltenham, at which place Francis Blockford was to meet them, in consequence of a letter written by his mother expressive of her anxiety to see him there on very particular business, and in which not one syllable about health or change of air was mentioned.

It is impossible to express the relief which Batley experienced when he heard of this determination ; he was himself again : and not prepared for the defection of Mortimer upon the occasion of the celebration, which seemed but too probable, he danced and jumped about

with the greatest imaginable activity, and with his bride elect and her sister continued his mirth day after day, till that arrived which was finally to seal their destinies.

That day, as all days will, at length came ; and all the forms and ceremonies, which we have already anticipated in description, were performed upon the most liberal and extensive scale. We have already deprecated the idea of entering into details, and yet the reader would not be satisfied without hearing some of the particulars.

In the first place, it should be understood that Mortimer and his lady dined with Batley and Mrs. Catling and Miss Fitz-Flannery, the day before the wedding : nobody else was there ; and Mortimer was extremely agreeable and gracious ; and Helen felt extremely odd at finding herself a visiter in Grosvenor Street House, although, as yet, it had not passed into the hands of another mistress ; but Helen made up her mind to like her new mother-in-law, and behaved, as she could when she chose, so as to engage and win

all hearts. It struck her that the rooms all looked smaller, that the hall was narrower, that the sky was darker, the atmosphere thicker, the little inclosed garden behind the house more miserable, and the sparrows that hopped about it much blacker than they used to be; and the rattling of the coaches astounded her; a knock at the door, which could be heard in the dinner-parlour, startled her; and, when she returned to sleep at the hotel, the air seemed less pure and fragrant than she used to think it when stepping from Almacks to her carriage, breathing the incense of sundry link-boys, or curtained within Lady Bembridge's five-feet square box at the opera, she inhaled the odour of gas, and the breath of some two thousand exceedingly warm ladies and gentlemen. Habit is second nature; and the return to scenes, now for some months abandoned, only served to show her to what people must necessarily submit who are resolved to live in "the world."

The after-dinner conversation of Mortimer and Batley upon this special occasion was pre-

cisely what might be expected from two men of the "world" placed in their relative positions,—a sort of extremely friendly and confidential interchange of thoughts and sentiments, in which not the slightest approximation was made to the actual state of affairs, or the real nature of their opinions.

"I was sorry," said Jack, "that your charming friend, the Countess, is unable to honour us with her company to-morrow, as she had kindly promised."

"Her son is unwell," said Mortimer.

"She is a most agreeable person," said Jack, "quite an acquisition in a country-house."

"Extraordinary spirits," said Mortimer: "she is a very old friend of mine; her husband was a worthy man."

"The son is a fine youth," said Jack.

"Yes," said Mortimer; "very like his father, I think."

"I don't remember ever to have seen him," said Jack. "Pray, Mortimer, when do you expect Magnus in town?"

"That I don't exactly know," said the son-

in-law ; “ he has been obliged to go to a sick aunt, or cousin, or something of that sort in France :—exceedingly inconvenient to him just at present ; but he is so kind-hearted that he sacrificed every personal consideration to the desire expressed by his relative.”

“ It was quite unexpected,” said Jack ; “ the day we came up to town together, he knew nothing of it.”

“ No,” said Mortimer ; “ it is impossible to describe his activity, slow as he seems to motion, when he is actuated by any sympathy which touches his heart. By the way, Batley,” continued Mortimer, “ what a prize you have drawn in the lottery of life !—a favourite expression, I remember, of Lady Thurston’s, speaking on the same subject ;—your widow is charming !”

“ Upon your honour ?” said Jack, holding his glass in his hand in a state of suspense ; “ really,—eh ?—do you think so ?”

“ Quite charming,” said Mortimer, “ perfectly handsome ; and so extremely natural—nothing *maniérée*.”

“ I think she is all *that*,” said Jack, sipping his wine, and looking diffident ; “ there certainly is no pretension about her : and, I think, the more you know of her, the more you will like her.”

“ They are nice people,” said Mortimer ; “ the sister is very agreeable,—lively.”

“ I am delighted to find you think so,” said Jack. “ I really look forward to a very nice family circle. I *do* think we may not be very unacceptable guests at Sadgrove.”

“ Nothing can be more delightful than the anticipation,” said Mortimer.

And so these two men of the world went on deceiving themselves into the belief that they were deceiving each other : Batley “ buttering” the Countess, whom he detested ; and his son-in-law praising the widow, whom he dreaded,—upholding the benevolence of Magnus, whom he knew to be a bankrupt in fortune, and vouching for the extraordinary likeness of Francis Blocksford to his deceased parent, to whom he bore no more resemblance than Julius Cæsar did to Sir William Davenant : and, to crown

the whole as it were triumphantly, Mortimer wound up the dialogue by promising that he and Helen would be at the door punctually at ten o'clock in the morning; he knowing, at the moment he said so, that he would not face the Bishop of Dorchester for ten thousand pounds.

They joined the ladies, and it was not unamusing to Helen to see her "Pappy" playing the lover on the same scene in which she had a few months before performed the character now enacting by Mrs. Catling. Batley's extremely agreeable manner and peculiarly juvenile appearance favoured the illusion; and nothing could seem more happy than the bride and bridegroom elect.

When the party separated for the night, Helen entertained not the slightest suspicion that Mortimer intended to absent himself from the ceremony, and subsequent *déjeuner*; indeed, at that period of her life, never having been separated from him since their marriage, the idea of its being possible that she could go anywhere into society without *him*, or without a *chaperon*, had never entered her head. She

never yet had exerted the power of that independence which is the privilege of the married woman, and felt as if she should sink under what appeared to her the heavy responsibility of acting entirely of herself and by herself. Mortimer was perfectly aware of her unsophistication touching this point, and therefore never dropped a hint of the probability or possibility of his not fulfilling the engagement for which he had expressly come to town. By the course he purposed to adopt, all beseechings, and remonstratings, and entreatings would be avoided; and the indisposition which he intended to plead as an excuse, would be of so extremely slight a nature as not to alarm his tender wife's fears; while his desire that she should punctually fulfil her father's wishes he was quite sure would be acceded to, as the performance of a double duty to both husband and parent.

The morning dawned brightly on the second marriage which it is our duty to record in these pages, and in all its circumstances and details the event very closely resembled the first we had to notice. Lady Bembridge and

the one bride's-maid, and Mrs. Catling and the other, with Helen, formed the female group. Jacob Batley, and Mr. Grub the clerk, and Mr. Brassey the attorney, being, with the exception of Lieutenant Horseman of the Life Guards, and the Curate, who assisted the Bishop, all the men whom in the then state of London he could secure. The defection of Mortimer, and the excuses of some five others, left him thus painfully deserted ; while, with the exception of Lady Bembridge, pledged on account of her niece's official character in the proceedings of the day, all the fair promisers had broken their faith. Poor Batley was exceedingly annoyed, not more by the absence of those who stayed away than by the presence of some who came. Brassey, vulgar as he was, was a necessary evil, and Jacob had both his near relationship and great wealth to plead in extenuation of his appearance ; but Grub surely might have been omitted : however, as the whole affair originated with his brother, of whom Grub was the special favourite, it was useless to repine ; a few words of explanation

to the bishop would set all that to rights. But the failure was most painful: nevertheless, it ought to be considered that his disappointments were all attributable to the season, and the emptiness of town, and the absence of all the "world" in the country.

When Mortimer, in the morning, imparted to Helen the impossibility of his venturing out, in consequence of a most dreadful sore throat which had suddenly and violently attacked him during the course of the night, she, as he had anticipated, declared her going without him to be impossible; that "Pappy" would break his heart; that she should be so miserable, that she could not bear the idea; and so on:—for all of which he had prepared by having called in the nearest resident apothecary, who assured the lady that, although the gentleman would run a great risk in exposing himself to the cold atmosphere of a church, there was not the slightest doubt but the confinement of even one day would restore him. This assurance, backed by a grave asseveration on the part of the same judicious practitioner,

that he would not answer for the consequences if the "gentleman" went; and enforced by the supplication of Mortimer, that she *would* go without him, Helen, more readily than he anticipated, acquiesced in the opinion expressed and in the mandate issued; and accordingly dressed, and proceeded to the mirthful scene, where she was the expected ornament.

The reader probably has discovered by this time that Helen Mortimer was a person of strong mind and quick perception; and although the tactics of "the world" in which she had been trained, and the policy even of the parent who had trained her, had not in the slightest degree injured her own principle, or deteriorated her own sincerity or single-mindedness, they had afforded her an aptitude of forming opinions upon very slight grounds, and deducing probably great results from actually trifling occurrences. Strange to say, however painful to her the refusal of Mortimer to accompany her to Grosvenor Street on the wedding morning might be, the surprise at his not going was by no means great. From the moment in

which the Countess St. Alme exhibited such unequivocal signs of emotion at the mention of the Bishop of Dorchester's name, Helen felt assured that *she* would not, even after volunteering, present herself. The tone and manner in which, upon that occasion, Mortimer pronounced the name of the Bishop, convinced her that he was fully aware of the reasons which existed for *her* not going to her father's wedding: thence she inferred, she scarcely knew why, but instinctively as it were, that the name of Sydenham was somehow connected with the circumstances of their early lives, much of which she knew, even without the friendly enlightenment of Lady Mary, they had passed together; and from that moment she anticipated that Mortimer would not endure the meeting to which it was evident the Countess either could not, or would not, submit herself.

It was perhaps this *pressentiment*, or rather conviction in her mind, that induced Helen the more readily to agree to the suggestion of going alone: she had a duty to perform to a

father whom she loved, and who affectionately loved her; and she believed, more especially after the declaration of the apothecary, meant to be affecting and emphatic, that her original suspicions had been just, and were now justified by the sudden ailment of her sensitive husband. This was not what it ought to have been, but it was natural that it should be.

Now come we to the point:—the carriages, —the bride,—the bride's-maids,—the friends, the few, the select few,—and the procession to the church, where the Bishop met the *cortège*. The ceremony was performed: there was no crying; the affair went on without sensation; and the party returned to Grosvenor Street, Bishop and all,—the Bishop's lady, however, being unable to join the party on account of a dreadful cold.

Down they sat. Gunter had been active, and had done his best on Jack's limited scale: there were high baskets and low baskets, and silver absurdities and tinsel absurdities, and pink fooleries and white fooleries, and all the other trasherics out of which a fashionable con-

fectioner contrives to make a fortune, drawn from the pockets of an aristocracy whose best-paid tradesmen are generally their bitterest political enemies: and the thing went on, or rather off, extremely well; and the new Mrs. Batley looked marvellously pretty.

The Bishop seemed to watch Helen and her conduct, and listen to her conversation, with an interest which excited a deep interest in *her*. He was a man in all respects qualified for the high and important position in society which he filled. Mild and amiable in temper and disposition, benignity and benevolence beamed in his fine countenance. Beloved by his family, in which he was the best of husbands and happiest of fathers, he was venerated and esteemed by his inferiors; and whosoever passed through the vicinity of his palace heard the blessings of the poor implored upon his head, as the most excellent of masters and the most charitable of men. Born of high blood, he was full of high principle: — not suddenly elevated from obscurity and a sordid lust for gain, but devoted to the sacred profession to

which he had voluntarily, anxiously, and conscientiously devoted himself, and which he graced and honoured by his virtues and his talents. Such was the Bishop of Dorchester ; — such was the Bishop that Mortimer did not dare to confront ; — such was the Bishop upon whom the eyes of the wife of Mortimer were fixed in admiration and respect.

Mr. Brimmer Brassey, who cared no more, spiritually speaking, for a bishop than a beef-eater, loved him outrageously only because he was a lord ; and therefore contrived, by one of those very extraordinary manœuvres which such men sometimes perform, to get next his lordship at the *déjeuner*. Helen doing the honours, the Bishop sat on her right, the bride on his lordship's right, and next the bride, Brassey. The bride shortly disappeared to prepare for her change of costume, and the party still remained : thus came Brimmer Brassey next the Bishop.

'The Bishop poured a few drops of wine into his glass, and, rising from his chair, proposed

the healths of the newly-married couple. How the toast was received, nobody can doubt. Jacob, who had never been in company with a bishop before,—except, indeed, in the shape of a tankard of burnt port-wine, with a roasted Seville orange stuck full of cloves swimming in the middle of it, — did not know how to get on: not so, Brassey. His lordship having agreed to wait until the “ young people ” took their departure for St. Leonard’s, where they proposed to pass the honeymoon, Brassey, finding himself so conveniently placed, in the very first lull of a conversation not particularly lively, looking the Bishop full in the face, twiddling one of his horse-hair whiskers with his finger and thumb at the same moment, said, *à propos* to nothing, and in a tone of perfect confidence,—

“ I say, my lord, what does your lordship think of the voluntary principle, — eh ? ”

The Bishop looked a good deal surprised, and began folding and unfolding the napkin which he held in his hand: after a moment,

he bowed, and smiled graciously, and said, —
“ I really am not prepared to answer that question. I ”——

Batley, who had, previously to the *déjeuner*, undressed himself and re-dressed for the journey, looked, as the sailors say, “ marling-spikes ” at the attorney ; but *that* did nothing : he had got hold of a bishop to work, and a lord to talk to.

—“ Because,” continued he, “ my lord, what I wanted to say to your lordship is this, my lord :—if, my lord, your lordship will only put your lordship’s nose out of your lordship’s *charrot winder*, as your lordship goes down to the House of Lords, your lordship will see, if your lordship will but look ”——

“ I believe,” said the Bishop, “ Mrs. Batley is waiting for us ; at least, the carriage is ”——

“ Ay, ay,” said Brassey, “ that’s it, my lord. I never can find one of your lordships to ”——

“ I appeal to you, Lady Bembridge,” said the Bishop, “ if we ought to talk or think of

anything this morning but the happiness we anticipate for our friends."

"Why," said Lady Bembridge, "I never give an opinion; but, when a ceremony of this sort takes place, it is certainly understood that the object of the meeting is confined to the particular celebration of the — Oh! dear, here comes our charming Mrs. Batley!"

Luckily, the appearance of the widow-bride, in a morning dress which became her infinitely more than the extremely *mal-à-propos* adornments of lace and satin, and all the *etceteras*, so ill adapted to broad sun-light, stopped this charming conversation; and, the carriage being announced, the affair seemed at an end, and everybody prepared for a start.

Batley felt agitated and excited: he had undergone certain mortifications as to the party;—in fact, there was nothing to relieve what might be called the absolute vulgarity of the company, save and except the Bishop's wig and Lieutenant Horseman's *moustaches*: the rest was painfully below Jack's mark; and, to

say truth, besides all those anxious palpitations which, of course, must agitate the hearts of young bridegrooms, Jack felt almost as much relief in dispersing his ill-assorted party, as he did in finding himself so very near the exclusive possession of his second Mrs. B.

Everybody was now on the move: the functions of Lady Bembridge's niece were at an end, and she brooded under her aunt's fostering wing; Miss Fitz-Flannery was to remain with Miss Rouncivall for two or three days: the horses were pawing the pavement, and the cockneys were standing in a group before the house-door: — inasmuch as even the simple fact of calling a hackney-coach and getting into it, or stopping one and getting out of it, will infallibly collect a group of spectators in the metropolis, in which, it is supposed, the great mass of the people have not a moment to spare.

“I beg your pardon!” said Brassey to Jack, who shrank from his appeal with a horror the most sensitive, — “Mr. Grub, will *you*?”

What was to happen, Jack did not justly understand.

“ It is just merely to sign the settlement-deed,” said Brassey. “ Will you ask Mrs. Batley to come? — it is all ready in the back parlour. Grub will be witness.”

“ Oh ! to be sure,” said Jack, delighted that something like business gave the horrid Brassey a momentary claim upon his attention ; — “ shall I call her ? ”

“ If you please,” said Brassey, doing up his hair with his fingers.

Batley called Teresa, and Teresa came, — and so did Jacob ; and then there were Teresa, and Batley, and Jacob, and Grub, and Brassey ; and there was the deed of settlement, drawn according to the draft submitted to Jack ; and Jack signed it, and Teresa signed it, and Grub witnessed it, and Brassey certified it : and then Jacob kissed Teresa, and so did Batley ; and so did Brassey, which Jack did not much like ; and so did Grub, which Jack did not like at all : — however, it was all settled and done, and the carriage was quite

ready, — the man and the maid packed up in the rumble.

The Bishop stepped forward, and, offering his arm to the bride, led her to the steps.

“ By Jove ! sir,” said Brassey to Batley, “ what a fortunate man you are !—that woman, — eh ? —and her devotion to you !”

“ Yes,” said Batley, “ yes,” in a sort of pooh-pooh-ing way, and endeavouring to shake off his toady.

—“ But, Mr. Batley,” said he, with an expression of countenance which attracted his attention, “ you do not know, as I believe, how much you really do owe her ; and I ought to tell you.”

“ How do you mean ?” said Jack.

“ A proof of her devotion,” said Brassey, “ which is, as we say at the Slap-bang Club, entirely unequivocal. That kind-hearted creature had a jointure of fifteen hundred pounds a-year so long as she remained a widow, to be reduced one-half when she married again : that, Mr. Batley, she has sacrificed for *you* ; and I was sworn never to let you know the

extent of her disinterestedness till the affair was irrevocable."

"Sacrifice half her jointure!" said Jack, —
"amiable, excellent woman! — this is a proof of her affection. But to whom does the other seven hundred and fifty pounds per annum revert?"

"*To your brother Jacob,*" said Brassey.

"Come," said the Bishop good-humouredly, walking into the room, — "come; the bride is in the carriage and waiting."

"Thanks! my lord," said Jack; "here I come: so, good-b'ye! and a thousand acknowledgments for your kindnesses! — So, that's the story, is it?"

Mr. John Batley was forthwith buttoned up with his new wife, and away they went. The party almost immediately separated; but, in addition to the rest of his liberality upon the occasion, Mr. Jacob Batley gave a snug dinner to Messrs. Brassey and Grub at "The Horn," at half-past four, with an extra bottle of Mr. L.'s port, to commemorate the day upon which he had ensured the happiness of

his brother and a charming lady ; and had, at the comparatively trifling sacrifice of one thousand pounds, secured to himself an additional seven hundred and fifty pounds per annum out of the estate of his late friend Kit Catling.

CHAPTER VII.

To a man of Batley's character and disposition, nothing on earth could be so ill-timed as a surprise like that caused by Mr. Brimmer Brassey's intelligence. He was, to use a colloquial phrase, "struck all of a heap" by this fresh evidence of his worldly brother's avarice and self-love; and, if his vanity had been somewhat mortified by the defection of his aristocratic friends from his wedding, his *amour propre* was infinitely more wounded by the conviction that he had been made the dupe of his near relation, for whose intellectual qualities he did not entertain the highest respect, and to whom he was perpetually in the habit of offering advice, based upon the soundest principles of the science of diplomacy.

But above all this, and more acutely, did

he feel the extraordinary position in which his wife's sacrifice of half her income out of sheer affection for *him*, had placed him with regard to *her*. He never had expressed, never could have expressed, his high sense of such a mark of attachment and devotion, inasmuch as he never had been made aware of the fact till the very moment before he stepped into the carriage. She must unquestionably have considered him strangely insensible to her kindness, inasmuch as she never could have given him credit for ignorance upon so striking a feature in her conduct ; and even now, he could not endure that she should become acquainted with the fact, that the circumstance had never been imparted to him, or that he had suffered himself to be so completely led and outwitted by Jacob.

But above all did he feel the loss of the moiety of the lady's jointure, arising, as it did, from the extraordinary propensity for "grasping," which could induce one brother to act so unfraternally towards another, as Jacob had acted towards him. The reflection that, pos-

sessing the influence which he evidently did possess over the widow, he might, by waiving the penal condition of the will, have put fifteen hundred a-year into his possession for life, without the positive sacrifice of a shilling of his own, rendered the mere loss of the additional income a secondary grievance. Now was it that Jack solved the problem of the thousand pounds bonus ; now did he account for all the hospitality and welcomes he received at his brother's hands the moment the scheme of marrying Mrs. Catling was started ; and, to add to the unpleasantness of his position, all these facts, circumstances, incidents, plots, contrivances, and arrangements crowded into his mind at the very moment when his thoughts should have been exclusively employed in expressing to his fair companion the happiness he enjoyed in the attainment of the object of all his earthly hopes, and the fulfilment of all his worldly wishes.

Mrs. Catling —or rather Mrs. Batley — was not at all slow in discovering the extraordinary change which had taken place in her dear

Benedick's manner ; and, to do him justice, no small part of his abstraction and uneasiness arose from the difficulty he felt in devising a scheme to make her understand how highly he appreciated the sacrifice she had made for his sake ; for, after all, Jack was not mercenary. He sought a wife, to soothe his wounded variety ; and, having made up his mind to marry, considered it prudent to get one who would bring to their common stock a sum adequate, in a certain degree, to the increased expenditure of his establishment ; but beyond that, now that Helen was settled in the world, he cared nothing : — but *then*, the deception practised upon him by Jacob, — the mean, low, dirty, peddling selfishness of the lord of Lilypot Lane, created feelings which ought never to have been excited, but which it was impossible for him entirely to conceal.

Upon the mind of the now Mrs. Batley the effect produced by the change which had been so evidently and unequivocally wrought in the spirits and manner of her spouse, might be considered to be something like the disappoint-

ment experienced by the noble lord who bought Punch, and found, when he got him home, that he could not make him squeak; or that, which the lady, who had united herself to a wag, the fiddle of the company, felt when she found, as the old story goes, that, once domesticated, her facetious partner used to hang up his fiddle in the hall with his hat. Your very lively and agreeable creatures in society are by no means so gay and vivacious when at home, where, as “monarchs of all they survey,” they feel the full force of the authority which empowers them to bestow all the residuum of their dulness, or even ill-humour, which long bills, heavy expenses, and a small revenue, are by no means ill calculated to generate, upon their near connexions and relations. And, as for high spirits, the bow must be unstrung sometimes:—the people whose feelings are most excitable by gaiety and mirth, if their feelings at least be worth anything, are always, as Moore poetically tells us, the most susceptible of pity, compassion, and sorrow.

To be sure, in her first matrimonial experi-

ment, Mrs. Batley had not succeeded in acquiring a companion calculated at any time to afford any very striking contrast between his home and foreign conduct; for, if ever there lived a matter-of-fact man upon earth, Catling was one,—perfect, pure, and unsophisticated. Equally incapable of taking as of making a joke, his conversation, when lively, turned upon what he called the pleasures of the table, and the various modes of cooking certain highly esteemed dishes; and, when of a graver character, was directed to the developement of his own prudential schemes for getting money;—eating and accumulating being the great objects of his care and ambition: the results now attained by his exertions and assiduities being, his own repose under the floor of Islington Church, and his widow's second marriage, with the loss of half her jointure.

But although Teresa had lived this life, and gone on “never minding it,” hoping for brighter days,—a hope which, under the circumstances, will perhaps not bear any very minute examination,—she felt that she deserved a better fate. She loved gaiety, and gaiety of a higher

sphere than that to which she had been dragged down by her weighty partner afforded ; and having, as she thought when she rose on the morning of her second marriage, secured to herself the society of a man whose tastes and feelings seemed entirely to assimilate and agree with her own, it may easily be supposed that the consciousness of the sudden alteration of his look and manner, which has been already noticed, caused a pang in her bosom which she was ill prepared to feel.

“ Are you ill ? ” said the lady, looking doubtfully at Jack ;—there might have been a slight dash of reproachfulness in the glance.

“ No,” said Jack, “ not ill :—no, my dear Mrs. Catling, — not ill.”

“ Mrs. Batley,” said Mrs. Catling, drawing up coldly and somewhat indignantly.

“ I beg a thousand pardons ! ” said Jack, “ but,—really,—I have just heard something,—something so very surprising,—so very mortifying,—that,—upon my word and honour,—I ”——

“ What does it relate to ? ” said Teresa.

“ Why,” said Batley, more puzzled than

before, “ why, that ’s it : it is something so extremely strange, — and so particularly delicate, — and so very abominable, — I never can explain ; — it must explain itself.”

“ How very strange !” said Mrs. Batley. “ I never saw you so agitated before. Is it bad news ? — tell me, as the first proof of your confidence in me. If you don’t, I shall fear that I have done something, or that you have heard something about me, calculated to lower me in your esteem.”

“ No,” said Batley ; “ on the contrary, it raises you in my esteem. It is *there* I feel the principal difficulty of my case, — how to express my sense of gratitude for the sacrifice you have made on my account.”

“ Oh !” said Mrs. Catling, or Mrs. Batley, whose heart was full of Irish liberality and spirit, “ now I know what you mean, — the condition of Mr. Catling’s will, — I’m sure that is just what you mean. Why think of that just now ?”

“ Why,” said Jack, “ it is but five minutes ago I was made aware of the circumstance : —

and there, I say, is the difficulty, — to think how insensible of your kindness I must have appeared, never to have expressed my thanks for your giving up — in short, — really it seems so strange !”

“ What !” said Teresa, with a look of comic astonishment, “ did Mr. Brassey never explain that to you ?”

“ Never till the instant I left the house,” said Jack.

“ Oh !” said the lady. “ And what difference does it make in whose name the money is paid, so as we enjoy it together ?”

“ Enjoy what together ?” said Jack.

“ It is all one,” said Teresa ; “ we won’t quarrel about that, rely upon it : you are quite welcome to call the other half yours. I dare say you won’t stint me nor starve me.”

Hereabouts Jack became more mystified than he was before, and it took at least eighteen miles of reasonably moderate travelling to make the case entirely clear to the comprehension of the “ high contracting parties ;” but when, after nearly two hours had been expend-

ed in the discussion of the business, it appeared that Mr. Brimmer Brassey, as solicitor on her part, had represented that Jacob's liberality towards his brother was such, that, although she nominally must forfeit half her jointure by the marriage, he should take care that her husband should receive it; while, as solicitor for Jack, the same Mr. Brassey had entirely omitted any mention of such desire or disposition on the part of Jacob: and thus, by playing the game for both hands, the worthy trader had completed his design, satisfied from the delicacy of the lady, and the thoughtlessness of Jack, that the parties themselves would come to no explanation; a circumstance rendered most certain by Jack's frequent expressions of gratitude for his brother's liberality in the affair, which she, without venturing to touch the matter further, was fully convinced referred to the sacrifice of the other seven hundred and fifty pounds a-year, which, with a generosity equal to her own, he had nobly given up in order to bring about the much-desired marriage.

It was droll to see, — or rather would have been had there been a third person present, — but it was droll to hear afterwards, how gradually Teresa and her husband advanced in the avowal of their hatred of Jacob's avarice, and in their abuse of him generally. Teresa, of course, went slowly at first, for fear of wounding her new husband's fraternal feelings; and Jack was gentler in his remonstrances, lest *she* should be annoyed by his reprehension of the friend of her old one: but as they warmed with the subject, and as Jack's spirits rose in consequence of having unburthened his mind, their abuse of the curmudgeon with whom they were both so nearly connected, knew no bounds; nor did the attorney get off with much less vituperation. A sentence of exile from Grosvenor Street was on the instant pronounced against them both, the more especially as Mr. Brassey — a fact already alluded to — had made some rather unequivocal manifestations of a desire to be received as the suitor of the yet unmarried Miss Fitz-Flannery.

It was, however, fortunate for the peace of

mind of the bride and bridegroom that the explanation had been come to. He was charmed to be assured of the warm-hearted disinterestedness of his fair partner ; while she, in being able to account for a depression and silence which at first excited her alarm and apprehension, entreated him to think no more of the unhandsome trick which had been played off upon them, but to believe that, poorer or richer, she could never be happier than she was at the then present moment.

And so the sunset of the wedding-day was brighter than its rising, and, during a stay of three weeks in their retirement, each hour seemed to add to their esteem and affection for each other ; and although, as has been already surmised, Mrs. Batley the second was not remarkable for any high intellectual powers, she was gay in her manner, handsome in her person, gentle in her blood, and good-humoured beyond question : and Jack walked up and down, and here and there, with his pretty wife on his arm, quite satisfied with his bargain, and wishing every minute of the day that

Miss Thurston could only just see how charming a partner he had secured for life.

At the end of ten days Miss Fitz-Flannery joined them at St. Leonard's, and there, for the present, we will leave the trio; Jacob being not a little surprised at never receiving a line from any of them, but, as usual, not caring enough about them to trouble himself to inquire into the cause of their silence. He might have guessed; and, if he did guess, it is extremely probable that he and his legal adviser might have agreed that it would be best to let the transaction remain as it was, without making inquiries which might produce replies.

As to Helen, who, of course, was soon informed by her father of the extraordinary conduct of her uncle, she felt herself, for the first time, at ease, and mistress of her own house. The absence of the Countess St. Alme was a positive relief to her: Mortimer devoted himself implicitly to her society, and appeared as if, like herself, he was delivered from some unaccountable influence which seemed perpetually to keep him in a state of alarm lest he

should appear too much devoted to the society of a wife who was wholly devoted to *him*.

Two days after the marriage they had returned to Sadgrove, Mortimer's enquiries of Helen concerning the ceremony and its accessories being chiefly confined to questions with regard to the conduct of the Bishop of Dorchester. Whatever were the ties which connected this good and exemplary man with Mortimer, — whatever the reasons which existed for Mortimer's absence from the ceremony, — it was perfectly clear to the perceptive mind of Helen that they were equally powerful as far as the Countess was concerned ; and this conviction satisfied her that, whatever it might be, some bond of union existed between her husband and the lady, the nature of which she did not permit herself to question. In fact, the principle of action which, as we have already seen, she had in the outset of her married life adopted, was that of never seeking to enquire into events connected with Mortimer's early career, nor of permitting herself to believe that, let them be what they might, they

either did or were likely to interfere with her own comfort and happiness. It should also be remembered that, upon all the occasions when she had broken through this golden rule, she had been led to its infraction by the very woman who seemed, as far as one could judge, to have the strongest possible reasons for not recurring to days that were gone, or scenes that were past.

But the calm, however, was of short duration: Mortimer again became nervous and gloomy and irritable. It is scarcely possible to describe the anxiety and restlessness which seemed to affect him when three or four days had passed away, because it is scarcely possible to explain — scarcely to understand — the doubts and apprehensions which kept him in the most unenviable possible state of mind. It was not jealousy of others that excited this perpetual fear; as has been before stated, it was jealousy of himself that tormented him. The slightest and most perfectly unintentional reference by Helen to anything that had occurred while the house was full of guests, struck to his heart; and, before

the week of domestication was over, he had satisfied himself that the great design of his life in marrying Helen had failed. In fact, the pleasure — the delight which she experienced during the first three days of those seven, in finding herself shut out from the world with the man she loved, gradually faded in exact proportion to the increasing evidence of his mistrust ; and, truth to be told, she did not regret hearing that Colonel Magnus, whom individually and personally she disliked, was expected ; nor that Mr. Francis Blocksford had invited himself to pass a few days at Sadgrove at his mother's particular desire.

“ Dear Mrs. Mortimer,” writes the Countess, “ the Count feels so much benefit from the waters and the air, or probably the regular and abstemious life which the Cheltenham doctors enforce as an auxiliary to both, that I have resolved on remaining here, although it is not the usual season, until we take our departure for France. Mortimer and you will, of course, arrange as to our meeting,—the *point de reunion* and all the rest of it ; but, in the mean time,

Francis, who absolutely raves about you and Sadgrove and all its *agrémens*, wishes to be allowed to look again at the first English country-house he ever saw, at a different time of the year from that in which it first won his heart ; and so he will be with you to-morrow. If Mortimer can give him a little shooting, so different from the *chasse* with us at St. Alme, he will be delighted. He is really a kind, open-hearted boy ; and, although his present figure and appearance make *me* look rather old, it is not because I wish him to go from me that I have encouraged his disposition to leave Cheltenham, but because I wish him to go to *you*. I know you will like him ; he deserves to be liked ; and his godfather, young as he was at the time when he undertook the extremely ill-understood and little-regarded sponsorial duty, will, I think, not be displeased at showing him a little English sport."

Amiable, plausible, fascinating Countess ! What ! knowing that Mortimer and Helen were alone, did she fear that they might find their own society so agreeable as to induce

them to do without the infusion of external gaiety? — or did she wish Francis her son to become the more constant associate of Francis her friend, before their departure together to the Continent?

When Helen read, or rather gave the Countess's letter to Mortimer to read, watching, as she always did, every turn and change of his expressive countenance, she did not think, from what she saw, that he was altogether gratified by the proposition of the lady or the volunteer visit of her son: indeed, he did not leave his feelings upon the occasion to be guessed at.

“Umph!” said the master of Sadgrove: — “this is not altogether convenient. Surely, if we are so soon to join the St. Almes, she might have at least waited to improve my acquaintance with her son till we were all together.”

The tone in which these words were uttered, and the short personal pronoun by which Mortimer somewhat emphatically designated the lady, convinced Helen that her sensitive hus-

band was what the vulgar call "put out of his way" by the proposition.

"Oh," said Helen, "poor, dear fellow! why shouldn't he come if he likes?"

"Ah!" said Mortimer, "why not, indeed! — But if *I* do *not* like."

"But he is your godson, Francis," said Helen.

"I am quite aware of that fact," said Mortimer; "but, whatever my duty towards the young gentleman may be, it is extremely inconvenient having him just at this particular time. I expect Magnus; and he and I have many things to talk over,—matters of business, — and"——

"Well," said Helen, "all *that* you can talk over in the mornings. Give Francis Blockford a keeper and dogs, if he wants them; and, while he is amusing himself in the woods and copses, you and the Colonel can be managing all your state secrets."

"Who told you, Helen," said Mortimer, "that my friend Magnus and I had any secrets?"

“ Nobody, dear Francis,” said Helen, almost alarmed at the manner in which the question was put, — “ nobody, except yourself just this moment.”

“ I !” said Mortimer.

“ Yes,” said Helen more firmly, and in a tone which, if he had properly appreciated her character, he would have known indicated a resolution to maintain her ground in any discussion of such a nature as that which he seemed not particularly anxious to avoid. “ You told me that young Blocksford’s visit is particularly inconvenient just at this moment, because Colonel Magnus is coming, and because you and he have subjects to discuss.”

“ Ay,” said Mortimer, “ subjects, but not secrets.”

“ Ay,” said Helen proudly, and perhaps in a more imitative tone of voice and manner than he had ever seen her exhibit before ; “ but if subjects that cannot be discussed before a third person are *not* secrets, what are ?”

“ Indeed !” said Mortimer, looking surprised at the earnestness and animation of his wife ;

“ why, Helen, you take high ground upon this question. Is young Mr. Blocksford really so very charming a person, that his proposed visit can make you at once so eloquent in the cause ?”

Helen uttered no word, — no syllable ; but she fixed her bright black eyes upon the pale countenance of her husband, and looked as if she waited for an explanation of words the meaning of which she did not understand : — this was what her look conveyed. He was at no loss to comprehend his meaning.

“ I tell you,” continued Mortimer, beaten at his own weapons, caught in his own snare, and driven from the line he was about to take by the firm resolve, and look of conscious dignified, and yet indignant affection which Helen assumed, — “ I tell you that Magnus and I have no secrets, but we have matters to talk over ; and perhaps, besides that, he may bring a friend with him, — and, — I ”——

“ Oh !” said Helen, in a manner which fluctuated between the submissive and humble, and the scornful and ironical, “ any friend of

such a person as Colonel Magnus must surely be a suitable associate for the son of the Countess St. Alme."

"I don't know *that*, Helen," said Mortimer; "at least, you can be no judge of such matters: it is extremely unpleasant to me."

"I have done," said Helen, who was not sorry to find that any proposition of the Countess was liable to such a reception. "I have only to write to the Countess, and say we are unluckily prevented by circumstances from receiving her son."

"*You write!*" said Mortimer, in a tone which cut Helen to the heart; not because it was calculated to arouse her to a sense of her helplessness and inferiority, but because it served to carry fresh conviction to her mind that, be its cause or origin what it might, there did exist a power of control and command in the Countess over her husband, which, although the lady might choose to conceal them in the present instance by communicating her wishes about Francis Blocksford to *her*, she had no power to resist or withstand.

“ If he come, Helen,” said Mortimer, lowering his tone of positive refusal to one of conditional acquiescence, “ the task of entertaining the young gentleman must devolve entirely upon *you* :” and his eye followed the conclusion of this sentence to that of Helen, who felt her bosom heave as his looks fixed themselves upon her face, and her heart beat rapidly ; but she would not believe that she understood what his manner implied.

Mortimer saw he had inflicted a wound, and in an instant repented.

“ The Countess,” said he, “ treats us, I think, *de haut en bas*. It is all extremely well her fixing *herself* here ; but making my house a hotel for her son, and putting my preserves at his disposal, is a little too much.”

“ Well, then, Francis,” said Helen, earnestly and sincerely, “ if you think so, refuse her proposal, — decline the visit. Let us not go with them to France ; let us remain here. My father and his wife can come to us, and so get rid of the St. Almes at once.”

“ Ha, ha, ha !” said, or rather laughed,

Mortimer, if that could be called a laugh which sounded almost sepulchral. "So, because the Countess worries me for the moment by offering her son as a visiter at an unsuitable period, I am to relinquish the oldest friend I have in the world. No, no. I will not tell the Countess of your suggestion, Helen; but do not make it again."

The manner in which her husband disclaimed the intention of making the communication to the lady, led Helen to believe that he would make it to her at the first opportunity; and she almost repented of the burst of ingenuousness which had betrayed her into making it.

"He must come, of course," continued Mortimer, in a tone indicative of the positive necessity of submitting to the absolute will of his mother; "and then, I suppose, we shall all meet at some given point preparatory to our start:—London I should prefer. London, in my mind, is the nearest way to every place in England from any other; and so—write, Helen,—say how glad we shall be to see him: tell him he need bring neither guns

nor any other implement of sport, he will find everything here : and give my best love to his mother, and so on — you understand the *façon de parler*; — and, as you say, Magnus and I must transact our business' affairs in the morning, and — yes, yes, we shall make it out, I dare say. Write by this afternoon's post," added Mortimer, as he quitted the room ; "and, dearest, give direction for Magnus's room to be got ready, and a room for his friend, — if he bring one ; and if he should not, which I most sincerely hope may be the case, there's no harm done."

As the door closed, Helen's eyes remained fixed upon the space which her husband had so recently occupied. What was her destiny, — what was to be her fate. Every day, every hour, afforded her fresh evidence of the unsettled state of her husband's mind, and of the restlessness of his feelings. He seemed to live a life of constant doubt and apprehension, — of care and watchfulness ; and when the fit was on him, his words, hastily and unguardedly uttered, and his manner, flurried and discom-

posed, combined to assure his devoted Helen, that her affection for him was questioned, and her sincerity suspected.

The tears, which pride had checked while he was present, chased each other down her cheeks now that he was gone: she felt alone in the world, as in truth she was. As has already been remarked, the circumstances of her youth, and the mode of her education, had left her without female friends of her own age and standing in life. She looked round her and saw no one to whom she could appeal for either advice or support: there seemed no alternative but the Countess, whom, even if she liked as a companion, she feared as a woman, and could not bring herself to trust as a friend. She found herself daily approaching a period at which, as her exemplary sister-in-law had said, the care and tenderness of a female relative would be valuable and important, and saw no prospect of sympathy or consolation even in the distance. Worlds would she have given, if Mortimer could have been persuaded to accept Mrs. Farnham's offer of a visit. But

no : that was interdicted, as she believed, at the Countess's suggestion, or, at least, with her perfect concurrence, — and why ? Because Mrs. Farnham was too good and too devout. Strange reasons for keeping her apart from her sister-in-law, but so it was.

When her father first imparted to her his design of marrying again, Helen joyously acquiesced in all his views, thinking that by securing his own domestic comfort, he might bring into the domestic circle an agreeable companion and friend for herself. He *had* married ; but although *his* part of the design might have been accomplished by his union with Mrs. Catling, his daughter's hopes were not likely to be realized by the connexion. The lady had nothing either in manner or character likely to attract Helen to her ; and although she would have been delighted to make up a Christmas party at home, which might have included her father and the two ladies, rather than fulfil the engagement to the St. Almes, she feared that even a more intimate knowledge of their qualities would

not in any great degree conduce to the increase of her esteem or affection for them.

She made an effort to stifle her grief, and proceeded to fulfil the duty assigned to her by her husband, of writing a worldly letter to the "dear Countess," setting forth, in the most affectionate phraseology, the happiness which the visit of her son would afford both Mortimer and herself; and, in fact, putting into conventional language, all that her husband had suggested.

When she had finished the despatch, she carried it to her lord and master, who was in the library. He was occupied in writing, and appeared somewhat confused by the sudden appearance of his lady; and with an abruptness meant to look purely accidental, contrived to cover, with other papers, the letter upon which he was sedulously employed. He might have left it as it was: neither idle curiosity, nor any anxious desire to know more than he chose to tell her, would have led Helen to question him as to the object of his labours. He took the task he had set her, and read it;

and, as his eyes followed the lines across the paper, his lip curled with a sneering smile of inward satisfaction; how particularly excited, Helen, who watched every turn of his countenance, could not exactly comprehend.

“Will that do, dearest?” said Helen, when he had finished.

“Admirably, my dear Helen,” replied Mortimer: “you write with as true a semblance of sincerity as you can act. Who would suppose that this cordial letter was the production of a young lady who, five minutes before she sat down to write it, suggested the utter rejection from her visiting list of the lady to whom it is addressed?”

“I spoke, Mortimer, for myself,” said Helen; “I have written for *you*: — I may have my feelings, my thoughts, and my wishes. I know it is my duty as a wife to repress them, and act in obedience to one whose judgment may be supposed to be more matured than my own, and, above all, whose will in ^{this} house should be law.”

“Upon my word! Helen,” said Francis,

“ you are almost as good in Tragedy as in Comedy. I did not mean to vex you ; I merely made an observation generally applicable to the whole world.”

“ I am no actress,” said Helen. “ Heaven knows I never was accused of deceit or hypocrisy : still, still that hateful day and its events haunt your mind ! What object could I have had in all that affair but, at the Countess’s desire, to shield her from your anger.”

“ You are a dear, kind-hearted girl !” said Mortimer. “ I believe it ; but I still maintain that you should not have permitted *her* influence to supersede mine.”

“ Are we to begin again upon that subject ?” said Helen : “ I thought it was all ended and forgotten. The influence of the Countess is, I know, something irresistible, and affects others as deeply as even I have been affected by it.”

“ There, there,” said Mortimer, — “ I have done. I beg your pardon, Helen ! I know she is a ^{*}very extraordinary woman, and you are quite right in writing thus kindly ; — but,”

added he, playfully, "you can't bear to be joked with."

It seemed, by the manner in which Helen was agitated by her husband's renewed reference to her "acting," placed in juxta-position with her "writing," that she and Mortimer had formed very different opinions upon the subject of joking. Such, indeed, was the effect he produced by his abrupt and unexpected allusion to her "hypocrisy" upon the occasion in question, that nothing could have prevented a "scene" but the timely announcement to Mortimer of a visiter in the person of the Rector, which terminated the dialogue, and gave Helen an opportunity of retiring from the library by an opposite door.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE reader may, perhaps, think that the frequent descriptions of scenes of this sort are unnecessary and uncalled for, inasmuch as their recurrence leads to no great result; but a moment's reflection may perhaps furnish an excuse, if not a reason, for placing them upon record, inasmuch as the conduct of Mortimer upon every occasion of the kind, exhibited to Helen in their true colours the character and disposition of her husband, disconnected from all the occurrences of his earlier life, as they existed at the moment; and that exhibition convinced her that never were two minds or tempers more diametrically opposed to each other than hers to his, or his to hers.

Helen, as we have seen, was always candid, — except when, to her own self-abasement and

mortification, she consented to “act” under the management of the Countess St. Alme. She was open-hearted, powerfully affected by passing circumstances, impassioned, and even violent in her passion; but the burst once over, and her heart relieved by the outbreak of its feelings, she was calm, placid, and content, and on the tablet of her memory there rested no mark of what had happened: if she had been right, she was satisfied; if she had been wrong, she satisfied herself by admitting her fault; but either right or wrong, she never felt either triumph or resentment beyond the moment. Such a heart, and such a mind, properly treated, would have ensured happiness to him who had, in fact, the first training of them in the world.

Mortimer, on the contrary, might forgive, but he never forgot. Subject, as we know, to fits of deep gloom, he was equally the victim of violent bursts of anger,—founded upon jealousy,—of himself, in the first instance: but when jealousy once gains ground and holds it, Heaven only can set bounds to its power and influence.

In these bursts of anger, all that had ever occurred at any period of his life in relation to the person their then present cause, flashed into his mind, and found utterance from his lips. He brooded over fancied injuries, and harboured the remembrance of them even though they had been long before explained away and expiated ; and whenever the chord was stricken which could awake their memory, no feeling of care or regard, either for himself or others, could restrain the reiteration of his often-repeated denunciations.

The reader will have seen that, from the moment the incident of the visit to the fishing-temple seized hold of his imagination, no adverse circumstance could occur, no trifling difference ever arise between himself and Helen, but *that* piece of duplicity was raked up to be thrown in her teeth.

Trifling, indeed, in point of fact, as that incident was, his perpetual recurrence to it irritated Helen more than she dared admit even to herself. “ I did err,” said Helen : “ it is true I did, under the influence of his friend ; but my

heart was nearly broken by my error. I admitted,—I apologized for it:—apologized!—I implored pardon for it; and that pardon was granted, and sealed, as I hoped and believed, with a husband's kiss of love! I cannot bear a constant reference to it whenever the slightest difference of opinion arises between Francis and myself; and then, if I show how much I feel the cruelty of such conduct, I am told I am not fond of jesting!"

In five minutes after Helen left the library, Francis was as much vexed as she could be, that he had permitted himself again to allude to the event, and listened with the most patient inattention to the eloquent pleadings of the Rector in behalf of some deserving family, anxious only to get rid of him that he might seek out his wife and soothe the sorrow which, the moment reflection came to his aid, he felt assured his uncalled-for and unjustifiable allusions had occasioned her.

This repentance was all extremely good, and the desire to make atonement for an injury inflicted, just and honourable; but the negative

course of not giving the pain he was so soon desirous of assuaging, would have been much more worthy, and infinitely more likely to secure the heart that he had made his own. Helen was yet but a young wife, and Helen regarded Mortimer with something amounting to awe. As time wears on, this may wear off; and if the tenderness of her affection shall become blunted by the rude shocks to which it seems likely to be subjected, the respect with which their relative situations, and even ages, might now inspire her, may perhaps be converted into some very different sentiment, and thus, divested of those restraints which she now imposes upon it, her temper *may* have its way. It is not, however, for us to anticipate.

It seemed, it must be admitted, a somewhat fortunate coincidence of circumstances that, upon the day in question, before the Rector had brought his tale of woe to a conclusion, Colonel Magnus, the redoubtable, arrived at Sadgrove, and, as Mortimer grievously anticipated, accompanied by "a friend." The pair, if pair they could be called, were an-

nounced and ushered into the library, where Magnus, having gone the length of honouring the Rector with permission to touch two of the fingers of his left hand, introduced his companion to Mortimer, whose astonishment, under all the circumstances, at beholding his person and hearing his name, was beyond anything that pen can adequately describe.

The Rector took his leave, and certainly he had no business in such company. It required at least three-quarters of an hour's explanation to satisfy Mortimer of the justice, expediency, or even the possibility, of finding the Colonel's companion a visiter at his house; at the end of which period, Magnus (they having retired for the purpose into Mortimer's own room) had thoroughly convinced him not only of the prudence and propriety, but of the absolute necessity, of bringing down to Sadgrove in his carriage no less a person than Mr. Brimmer Brassey, of Barnard's Inn, Gent. — one, &c.

The very fact of Mr. Brimmer Brassey's con-

fidential connexion with Jacob Batley, putting aside all his personal disqualifications as an associate, was sufficient to disgust Mortimer with his visiter; and the other fact of his having been actively, sedulously, and successfully employed in defeating at Mudbury the claims and pretensions of Magnus himself, seemed to him to render the present confederacy dangerous, if not almost disgraceful. However, Magnus had that magnificent manner of pooh-poohing down all Mortimer's oppositions and remonstrances, and a despotic way of marching over all difficulties in a "*Nec aspera terrent*" style of magnanimity, that if *he* thought Mr. Brimmer Brassey essential to his extrication from difficulties, and if *he* employed him as his agent, Mortimer must necessarily admit that Mr. Brassey was everything that he ought to be; and Mortimer, really and truly succumbing to this influence, whatever his own personal prejudice against him might be, his hostility was at an end, and Mr. Brimmer Brassey was right welcome to Sadgrove.

It would be extremely improper, at present,

so far to anticipate the future occurrences which we may have occasion in due time to notice, as to make any particular remarks upon the nature and character of this visit; but it seems as if the intelligence which Mr. Brassey had received with regard to the pecuniary connexion which existed between Magnus and Mortimer, and which, as the reader already knows, he communicated to Mr. Jacob Batley, was tolerably authentic. How far Jacob might have yielded to the disinterested suggestions of Mr. Brassey, as to playing with some of the "kites," (as he called them,) which were supposed to be flying about, and in how much he might have lent himself, or any part of his capital, to the temporary release of the embarrassed dandy, it is not for us just now to enquire; but it certainly does appear somewhat strange, that in so short a time, after having so strenuously opposed the gallant Colonel, and so successfully defeated him at Mudbury, Mr. Brassey should be found seated at his side under the roof of his most particular friend, with whom he had so recently made a sort of

brief official acquaintance as the *homme d'affaires* of the man Jacob, whom he himself hated so cordially.

Everybody has seen how a character for low legal dexterity brings a man forward in certain circles. When talent in this line is discovered, money, of course, will buy it: prejudice or feeling does not influence it, — delicacy or consistency does not control it. You might as well charge a Conservative physician with inconsistency for curing a Radical patient, as a Radical lawyer with treachery for serving a Conservative cause; nay, the very fact that an electioneering attorney has, as he would call it, “done his best” for a Whig, to the utter discomfiture of a Tory, affords the strongest possible reason to the next Tory who wants to beat a Whig, for employing him. Magnus’s good opinion of Brassey’s talent was painfully established in the controversy at Mudbury, and his personal vanity strengthened this conviction of his ability; for, said Magnus, drawing himself up to his full height, “If the fellow could contrive to smash *me*, with all my personal

influence and political character, in favour of such a person as Sir Christopher Hickathrift, of Tippeton Lodge, he *must* be something out of the common."

To this feeling, and the consciousness that something must be done further to relieve his necessities, which any person of greater respectability in the profession than Mr. Brimmer Brassey would hesitate to do, may safely be attributed the employment upon the present occasion of the worthy in the black velvet waiscoat.

"Have you heard from your father-in-law, Sir," said Brassey to Mortimer, "since his start?"

"No," said Mortimer, nearly paralyzed by the question and the manner in which it was put: "Mrs. Mortimer, I believe, has."

"Oh, indeed!" said Brassey,—"I suppose so:—she seems to *me* to be a very affectionate daughter. I hope Mrs. M. is quite well."

"Quite well, thank you," said Francis, with another "look."

"Missed you at the wedding, sir," continued Brassey: "very nice party. The Bishop is

a very charming man, — very ; and the bridesmaids looked uncommon pretty. Miss F. is a nice young woman, — don't you think so ?”

“ Miss — ?” asked Mortimer.

“ Mrs. J. B.'s sister,” continued Brassey : —
“ very nice young woman indeed. She is uncommon spry, — rather Hibernian, — but that 's no fault, in my mind : — sweetly lively. I think she would make a very pretty partner for a well-disposed young man in a good line of business.”

Mortimer stared, and so did Magnus : they bowed their heads slightly, and Magnus took a very large pinch of snuff.

“ Pray, sir,” said Magnus, looking particularly dignified, “ when shall we be able to proceed in our business ? I opened the particulars to Mr. Mortimer in the next room ; he knows that ” —

“ Why,” said Brassey, “ in a day or two I shall be able to make something like a calculation. I hope by Saturday or Monday to give you an outline of the terms and conditions.”

“ Saturday or Monday !” said Mortimer, in a tone of despondency ; — “ not before Saturday or Monday ?”

“ I think not,” said Brassey. “ I shall have to communicate with my clerk in town ; and then the insurance ; and then ”——

“ Oh ! well, well,” said Mortimer, “ I don’t mean to hurry on the affair ; and I hope you will make yourself at home while we have the pleasure of your company here. I only ”——

“ Never fear, Mr. M.” said Brassey. “ I have a rule for staying at country-houses, — ten miles a-day, sir. Go ten miles, — dine, sleep, and breakfast ; twenty miles, — stay two days, ditto ; thirty, — three days ; and so on : we are about a hundred and twenty-four from London, which makes ten days and the eleventh morning about the cut, — eh ? — ha ! ha ! ha !”

“ I fancy in ten days,” said Mortimer, “ we shall be on the other side of the water.”

“ What !” said Brassey, “ the Colonel, — eh ? — in Banco ? — ha, ha, ha ! Oh ! no, Mr. M. we must keep him out of *that* if we possibly can.”

The look which Magnus threw across the room at Mortimer was furious beyond measure.

“ I hope,” said Magnus, “ that two or three days will bring our affair to a termination.”

“ I fear not,” said Brassey : “ I have to deal with queer old codgers. If *I* had the money myself, you shouldn’t be plagued five hours about it ; but, as I say, the men who haven’t got the money are plaguy liberal : those who *have*, like it too well to part with it,—what I call slap-dash off-hand—ha, ha !”

“ Well,” said Mortimer, “ as we can proceed no further to-day, perhaps you would like to be shown your room, Mr. Brassey. Magnus, you are at home : I will ring and enquire what room is assigned to your friend.”

“ You are very kind, Mr. M. !” said Brassey, — “ very kind, indeed, sir ! Ah ! I wish we could thump a little of your liberality into your old uncle.”

“ Uncle !” said Mortimer, opening his large eloquent eyes, “ I have no uncle, sir !”

“ Not uncle Jacob ?” said Brassey.

“ Oh ! ”——

“ There’s a vast deal of good in him, sir,” said Brassey: “ uncommon fond of the stumpy, — that’s true: he likes his own way as much as anybody I ever saw. The proverb says, ‘ where there’s a will there’s a way ; ’ — your father-in-law should recollect that where there’s a way there’s a will. He should study his brother’s humours and fancies — that’s all, sir. He is easily led ; but the Old Gentleman with the hoofs and the horns, and the tail, — you’ll excuse my mentioning his name,— cannot drive him.”

Mortimer, who had carefully avoided any allusion to the last shabby trick which Jacob had played upon his brother Jack, was particularly desirous of cutting the conversation short at present, fully aware of the sort of evening that was in perspective, and wishing, if possible, to leave Mr. Brassey that period for the display of his eloquence, convinced that his evident readiness to talk, would be considerably excited by the wine which he felt certain he would swallow ; being moreover anx-

ious to make his peace with Helen before dinner, lest her serenity might be ruffled, and her appearance indicate a state of affairs which, as he was assured in his own mind that everything the attorney saw would be reported to her uncle, he least of all desired.

Mortimer even yet did not know or appreciate Helen's temper. He sought and found her: no lurking frown contracted her brow; no pouting lip proclaimed a "lingering grudge:" all that had occurred when they last met had, as usual, passed from her mind; and when she saw her husband approaching her, with a countenance neither in sorrow nor in anger, but lighted up with an expression of good-humour blended with what might be called "comic distress," caused by the unexpected arrival of Mr. Brassey, she ran towards him, charmed to see him pleased and animated, and anxious to know who Magnus's companion was; for although the arrival of the Colonel had been announced to her by her maid, nobody seemed exactly to know the name of the little gentleman in the black velvet waistcoat,

who came with a carpet-bag, and had no servant."

"What on earth can he be come for?" said Helen.

"Ay, there it is," said Mortimer; "that is one of our secrets."

Does not the reader perceive in this trifling observation the still-existing disposition which was perpetually vexing Helen. True, Mortimer was playful, kind, and good-humoured; but even in his gaiety and playfulness and good-humour he could not omit to remind her that the words she had used in some previous conversation were treasured in his memory.

"Oh! then," said Helen, "I shall enquire no more about him. Has he heard from Papa?"

"I never asked him," said Mortimer, "although he asked *me* if I had heard? In fact, the business he is here upon, is so totally disconnected from any concern of ours, — I mean as relates to the family, — that it did not strike me. It is necessary, for the sake of my friend Magnus, to be civil to him, but that is all."

Helen felt that she would give the world, if she had it, not to dine at table with the new guests, and felt, moreover, a sort of desolation in having no female friend or companion, even upon ordinary occasions like this, not to speak of the more important circumstances which we have before noticed.

The party did not meet until just before the second bell had been rung, and Brassey, never having visited Sadgrove before, (and his being there then was certainly one of those surprising things which much oftener happen in society than people imagine,) blundered about the lobbies and passages, and having, after many "bad shots" at different doors and corridors, found his way to the head of the principal staircase, followed his nose down into the hall, and was saved all further trouble and difficulty by the groom of the chambers, who opened the door of the small drawing-room in which people usually assembled before dinner. This act of civility being performed by somebody so much more like a gentleman than himself, or any of the bodies with whom he was in the

habit of associating, produced not only one of Brimmer Brassey's smartest bows, but when Jenkins stood with the door in his hand to usher him in, provoked the still more polite address of "Oh! dear, after *you*, sir!"

This mistake may be considered by some a *gaucherie* of the first order; but looking round the world, whatever may be one's inherent respect for high blood, it must be confessed that upon many occasions and in many instances the democracy of the second table have very much the personal advantage of the aristocracy of the first: and it did once happen to the narrator of this small history, at a party at which the attendance of blue coats and white waistcoats was profuse, to send a gentleman so clothed, three or four times, for soup, lobster-salad, jellies, and other nourishing supports, the absolute necessities of life for ladies after dancing, until at length, having borne with ineffable good-nature the toils which he felt conscious were inflicted on him unintentionally and by mistake, and in the "service of the fair," the aforesaid gentleman, upon a fifth demand, delivered in the

ordinary tone of—"Here, sir, get this lady some Macedoine,"—quietly turned to the narrator, and said,—“No, no : I have got all you asked me to get for your friends five times ; now it is time I should get something for myself.” It is needless to add, (as the jest-books say,) that your narrator was absolutely annihilated, —stammered an apology, the more difficult to make as what had previously happened, practically inferred his belief that the suffering gentleman was, in fact, a servant. The suffering gentleman, however, seemed perfectly aware of the mutual embarrassment, and behaved very like a gentleman who did not deserve to suffer by taking his seat next the narrator, and proving his claim to “guestship” by finishing with the said narrator at least one bottle of champagne, not to speak of the moral to the fable in the shape of two verdant, spiry glasses of Roman punch, which the Cockneys, to show their learning, think it right invariably to translate into “*ponche à la Romaine* ;” believing, to a certain extent, that it was invented

by the late eminent preacher of that name,—and more shame for him !

Having reached, to *him*, the *terra incognita* of the small drawing-room, Mr. Brimmer Brassey found himself entirely alone; his active punctuality having brought him to the ground rather before any other one of the very small family party with which he was destined to pass the day. He looked at everything he saw with extreme curiosity; but at himself in the glass over the fire-place with the greatest satisfaction; still there dwelt upon his mind a sort of embarrassing doubt why the very elegant gentleman who had given him precedence did not join him in the room. At length Mortimer himself arrived, and relieved him from the embarrassment of being alone, which is said to be, to a certain class of legal practitioners, a most disagreeable circumstance.

Mortimer, whose manners were, when he chose, agreeable almost to fascination, felt it his duty, hating Brassey as he did when he before encountered him, to put him perfectly

at his ease in his own house, and immediately on joining him began to inquire of him whether he shot with caps or flints, regretting that, it being late in the season, he was afraid he could not give him quite such sport as he would have had if he had favoured him earlier; hoped that Mr. Blocksford, a young friend of his, would be down to-morrow evening, and that they might have some tolerable amusement on the following day; and, in short, exhibited himself under the roof of Sadgrove in a character so different from that in which he had appeared at Batley's in London, that Brimmer was completely astounded. If he had been told that he was duped, deceived, or, as he would himself have said, "humbugged," by the specious flattery of his host, he would have angrily denied the imputation. The fact is, that Mortimer was a gentleman, and under whatever circumstances a guest once passed his threshold, his feeling, his taste, and his tact were, to put that individual upon a perfect equality with the rest of his visitors; in fact, the smaller the legitimate pretensions of that

guest, the more particular was his attention, in order to bring him to the general level of the then and there existing society.

When the elegant gentleman whose society Brimmer Brassey so deplored, threw open the door for the admission of Mrs. Mortimer, the attorney was as much astounded at what had been evidently his mistake, as he was at the appearance of the lady of the house. She bowed good-naturedly to *him*; but his anxiety was, to be exceedingly polite to her. He did not exactly know how to achieve this great end; but his first attempt was reasonably enough made in reference to the events of "Pappy's" wedding: a mild, placid reception of something which he meant to be facetious, stopped his further efforts in that way: and a subsequent sudden turn-round, from a sort of whisper which might have done remarkably well for the wives and sisters of the members of the "Slap-bang" club, which Helen effected in favour of Colonel Magnus, (whom she avowedly disliked, but who was, at all events and under all circumstances, incompar-

able with Mr. Brassey in every point of view,) left Mr. Brassey looking excessively uncomfortable.

Dinner was announced, and Mrs. Mortimer took the Colonel's arm, — Mortimer bowing to Brassey, who, in the excess of his civility, said, as he had already said to the groom of the chamber, "After you, sir," a difficulty which Mortimer got rid of by clapping him on the shoulder and pushing him before him, in order to let the servants suppose that his ignorance was merely affected, and that he was a particular friend of the house; it being, as we have already said, his invariable rule to put up the man who most needed putting up.

The party consisted of only the four, and nothing could be more dull. At dinner, of course, Magnus sat on Helen's right hand, and the attorney of Barnard's Inn on her left. In pursuance of his established principle, Mortimer paid him every due and undue attention. While under the excitement occasioned by handing about the *entrees*, Brassey was some-

what subdued; and his astonishment when Mrs. Mortimer put the *carte* before him was by no means small. Mortimer's cook was a *cordons bleu*, who piqued himself not only upon the variety of his dishes, but upon their novelty both of name and nature; but Brassey, who had never seen a *carte* placed upon a table, except, indeed, a *carte à payer*, was terribly confused, — first, by its appearance generally, and then by its contents particularly: and although he collected, — which, with his quickness, it was natural he should do, — that the paper described what there was to be eaten, the difficulty lay, not only in choosing between dishes, the characters and qualities of which he did not understand, but in pronouncing the names which custom or the cook had assigned them. However, the infernally persevering assiduity of servants, who offer everything that ever was put down upon a table to everybody who sits round it, released him from his embarrassment *that way*, and after half an hour, and a few glasses of champagne, Mr. Brimmer

Brassey became almost as vivacious and as much at his ease as he represented himself always to be at the "Slap-bang" club.

Things went on tolerably well till dinner was over, and, luckily, all the servants were gone, except the butler, whom, by a mistaken notion of saving his guests trouble in putting round the wine, Mortimer retained in the room. Now, of all men in the world, Mortimer being the most particular as to the character of the conversation which took place after dinner at his table, one would have thought would have been the last to adopt, and the first to discard, the melancholy restraint which is imposed upon society by the double-refined invention of keeping servants in waiting to pass the bottles. If there be a moment of the day in which men unbosom themselves, no matter upon what subject, it is in the hour, or even half hour, (if custom and fashion so say,) after dinner: and if anything can kill and entirely ruin and damnify the genial interchange of feeling and sentiment, the confidential avowal of opinions upon men

and things, for which the said hour or half hour seems to be the season, it is the presence of a circumambulating menial, who derives the only satisfaction which recompenses him for his trouble, from listening to the conversation, of which, however discreet he may be in the use of his knowledge, he becomes perfectly master, and which is left completely at his disposal, either for love or money, as the case may be.

Mr. Brimmer Brassey, in the outset, had been confused and worried, but he bore his infliction well. It is true, he ate mustard with his *Soufflet*, and covered his *Fondu* with sugar ; but he joked and laughed and went on upon the only subject of which he knew anything which could interest Mrs. Mortimer. All he talked about, was the wedding,—and the bride, and Miss Fitz-Flannery,—and the Bishop,—and his great delight at having sat next a Bishop at the *déjeuner* ;—“ he had no idea what pleasant people Bishops were : ” — which most luminous remark, followed by a loud Ha, ha, ha ! gave Helen the strongest possible indi-

cation that the period was rapidly approaching at which she ought to retire.

This she accordingly prepared to do, but, as she was rising from her chair to leave the room, Mr. Brimmer, Brassey, gallant beyond her warmest hopes, jumped up, and exclaimed in a sort of mock heroic manner, "Oh! Mrs. M. don't run away from us, yet!"

The awful silence with which Mortimer and Magnus, the aristocratic Gog and Magog of Sadgrove, received this little bit of liveliness, fell heavily upon Brassey's heart; and when Mrs. Mortimer, without taking the slightest notice of the attorney's "Slap-bang" civility, made a sign to Mortimer that she should *not* expect him in the drawing-room, Magnus gave an approving nod to the suggestion.

"Come, sir," said Mortimer — "Magnus, come up. I assure you the nights get cold: we'll have some logs put on the top of these coals, and draw round the fire. Now, Mr. Brassey, don't you think that will be more snug and comfortable?"

Brassey had not as yet been long enough in

the house to form any distinct idea of "snug and comfortable;" nay, such was his innocence that, totally unprepared for being marshalled to his chamber, his small mind was at present employed in considering (charged with champagne as it already was) how he should get to bed; and yet, such are the extraordinary circumstances of human life, or rather of modern society, that this man, who lived in a sort of terror during his temporary exaltation, was considered worthy to be made the associate of those who endured his presence merely because he was necessary to one of them as a means of saving his — pecuniary reputation.

Mortimer having, by one of those conventional signs which exist, and will, we hope, for ever exist between men and their wives, ascertained from Helen that, as she should not expect them, she would go quietly to bed, felt no inclination to balk Mr. Brassey's evident disposition to sit and drink for any given time and of any given quantity. The object of Magnus, as it may easily be conceived, was to gratify him to the fullest extent; and so Mor-

timer, whose convivial qualities, at least as far as an active participation in Bacchanalian revels went, were extremely limited, desired Jenkins to bring a particular sort of claret; having obeyed which order, he was dismissed from further attendance.

The claret was excellent, and Mr. Brassey swallowed it; and if the Severn itself had flowed in such a "regal purple stream," he would have gone on drinking it so long as he could sit. That period, however, was past long before even his host expected the downfall; for after having assured both Mortimer and Magnus that the business he had in hand would succeed; after having pronounced Mrs. Mortimer a charming woman, and gone the length of smacking the back of Colonel Magnus, and proclaiming him a devilish fine fellow, he suddenly lost his balance and measured his shortness on the carpet, whence he was carried to bed in a state of glorious insensibility, not much more perfect than might have been expected after witnessing his laudable exertions in imbibition.

At breakfast in the morning he did not show. To Helen this did not give any particular uneasiness. Mortimer had not only ordered every attention to be paid him, but had visited him himself: the symptoms of his complaint were not such as to excite any alarm, the greater part of his disorder appearing to arise from the lately-arrived conviction that he had exceeded his usual quantum.

When he himself awoke to a consciousness of his real position, his dread and apprehension were great, lest he had permitted the real object of his solicitude, or rather that of his client, to be of use in relieving Colonel Magnus from his difficulties, — difficulties of a nature so intricate and peculiar, that nothing but an almost immediate supply of ready money could rescue his property from ruin,—to have escaped him, during the discussions of the previous night.

Nothing can be more dreadful than the uncertainty in which a man who has, accidentally or incidentally, as was the case in this instance, drank so much of claret or any

other stronger potation, wakes in the morning, as to what *has* happened the night before. In point of fact, the visit of Mr. Brimmer Brassey was, — harmless as it seemed, — fraught with the ruin of more than one man of the party present; and, from what has already been noticed of the character of this “Gent. — one,” &c. it may easily be imagined, that when the point to be gained was important, he would not stick at trifles.

Is it not strange, — for this he did not know when he woke, — that during all the oddities, absurdities, and vulgarities of which he was guilty, until, unable to remove *himself*, he was literally carried from the dinner-table to his bed-room, not one allusion did he make to the business upon which he came down to Sadgrove; not one reference to his client, — (or, as he sometimes called him, his principal;) nor did the smallest hint escape him touching the name, character, or circumstances of that client. Does not this lead us to believe that men have two minds, — an outer mind and an inner mind? Statesmen get drunk, — at least,

they did before these no-drinking days ; (some probably indulge even now :) and yet the hilarity of the convivial evening never seems to affect the ministerial recesses of the brain. There never was, that we know of, an instance of a cabinet secret slipping out, tipsy soever as might have been any member of that important conclave.

Certain it is, that whenever Magnus or Mortimer endeavoured to draw Brassey to *the* point which alone interested them, after he had finished his second bottle, he evaded it altogether, or touched upon it with as much caution as he would have exhibited before he had tasted his first spoonful of soup in the outset of dinner ; nay, not five minutes before he tumbled off his chair, with which feat the entertainments of the evening concluded, he was descanting with the most pertinacious propriety as to the precise value of a stamp necessary to a certain deed which had accidentally become the subject of conversation.

Little, however, did Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer anticipate the results of Mr. Brassey's agree-

able dissipation. As the day wore on, and the attorney did not put in his appearance, the master of Sadgrove directed his man to visit him, and enquire whether he would like anything in the way of luncheon, or, as he privately added, — medicine. But no: all was in vain: — no remedies they could afford, or he apply, could stop the *fiat* which Nature had issued. The blow had fallen; Nature had issued a writ of *ca. sa.*; and Mr. Brimmer Brassey was relieved from all other worldly ills by the unquestionable commencement of a fit of the gout.

“The gentleman is very bad, sir,” said the servant, who had returned from the visit.

“Magnus,” said Mortimer, “your friend has got the gout.”

“The gout!” said Magnus: “what’s to be done?”

“The gentleman says,” continued the man, who seemed to possess the universal failing of all servants, — the desire to make everything appear as bad as possible, and to lay all manner of blame upon people who make visits to

country-houses with a carpet-bag instead of a valet, — “ the gentleman says he is afraid it is one of his periodical fits, which generally lay him up for a month or six weeks ; and his doctor never permits him to check them.”

“ Well,” said Mortimer, “ I will go up to him myself.”

The servant withdrew.

“ This is one of the most agreeable incidents that ever occurred,” said Francis.

“ Yes,” said Magnus, “ and to *me* most particularly delightful, inasmuch as it not only puts a dead stop to our business, but leaves on my shoulders the onus of having brought the little fellow here : in fact, the inconvenience which it may occasion me is but a secondary consideration.”

“ There is no inconvenience to *us* in the matter,” said Mortimer. “ There is his room ; I will send for our apothecary, assign him a servant to attend to his wishes, and eventually leave him in possession of Sadgrove, if the fit should hold until we take our departure for France.”

Even to his intimate friend Magnus, Mortimer could not permit himself to hint, — even to show by his manner, — that nothing could be more disagreeable than the circumstance which had occurred : on the contrary, the patient was his guest, and the friend of a guest ; and accordingly the gracious host proceeded to his room to offer all the consolation he could, and take his pleasure as to anything he might wish to have done with respect to his professional business.

Brassey was all gratitude, — but the most miserable of men. It had been found necessary to confide to the footman, to whose care he had been consigned, the key of his “ carpet-bag,” which contained so small a supply of shirts, stockings, &c. as to betray the economical character of his wardrobe ; while a file, as he would have said, of collars and fronts, with holes in them for his emerald studs, gave evidence of the superficiality of that delicate dandyism which dazzled the eye with its snowy whiteness. One tooth-brush twisted up in a piece of white-brown paper ; a razor by itself,

razor, tied with a piece of red tape to a round pewter shaving-box, (enclosing a bit of soap,) with the top of its handle peeping from the bottom of a leathern case, like the feet of a long-legged Lilliputian sticking out of his coffin; a remarkably dirty flannel under waistcoat, edged with light blue silk and silver; one pair of black silk socks, brown in the bottoms; an ill-corked bottle half full of "Russia oil;" a very suspicious-looking wiry hair-brush, and one shaving ditto, were amongst the most striking items of the *omnium gatherum*: Pandora's box, or the green bag of more recent celebrity, could not have contained so much of mischief to anybody in the world as this carpet envelope of Mr. Brimmer Brassey produced to him.

Talk of the gout!—it was nothing to the pain which this involuntary exposition of his private affairs occasioned; although, in truth, as Strephon says, the gout had nothing to do with the disclosure, for it was while he was insensible to the things of this world that the man had opened the "bag," in order to hunt

for the various articles of drapery which he considered necessary to establish him for the night, and who, with a mixture of attentive civility and *méchanteté*, had taken the trouble to lay out and spread on the table in the adjoining dressing-room, all the articles which it appeared, Mr. Brimmer Brassey deemed essential to his personal comfort.

There were, however, greater difficulties in the way than at the first blush of the misadventure presented themselves to view. However active the mind of the man of business might remain under his bodily sufferings, it was clear that the body itself was immoveable. That part of his duty which, as it seemed, involved the attendance of a surveyor, was, of course, impracticable; and the fact that his correspondence with his client must pass through intermediate hands in its way to the Post-office, rendered it necessary that he should enclose the communications he had to make to his own clerk, a person of matured years, and by some imagined to be the parent of his respectable employer. Even the great Lord

Chesterfield's unquestionable dictum, that gout is the gentleman's complaint, while rheumatism is distinctive of hackney-coachmen, could not reconcile him to the embarrassment in which he found himself involved ; and yet he dared not set the matter at rest by an appeal to Wilson, Husson, Colchicum, and Co. — inasmuch as (as, indeed, the servant had reported) Dr. Doddle, his own physician, had pronounced sudden death the inevitable consequence of any such violent application.

“ Of course,” said Magnus, when they returned to the library, “ we must not kill the man ; because one might have some qualms of conscience afterwards ; but I really think that it would be more advisable to try some other channel through which our matters might be managed.”

“ If it does not press imperatively,” said Mortimer, “ I should advise you to keep things still where they are : every fresh attempt opens the business in a new quarter ; and if, as you seem to think, this will answer your purpose eventually, you shall not, my

dear Magnus, be inconvenienced by any temporary pressure."

"No, Mortimer, I will not hear of this," said Magnus. "With a fortune like mine, and an influence the extent of which you know, it seems absurd to be *gêne'd* in the smallest degree: but West-Indian property has been so entirely demolished by the saintly white-washers of Aldermanbury, that if it had not been for the compensation which they gave me for that which they had rendered utterly valueless before, I should have been, as far as that source is concerned, completely gravelled. Now, the object I have"——

"My dear Magnus, say no more," interrupted Francis. "The plain fact is, you want money at the moment; at the moment it is within your reach, an unexpected event occurs which draws it away from you: — come into my room; let me sign a cheque on my banker, and you fill it up to the amount you require for present use, limiting yourself only to a sum which you think the worthy Sir An-

thony, — than whom there never lived a better man, — will honour by draft.”

“ My dear Mortimer,” said Magnus, “ you are a noble-hearted fellow, and the kindest of friends ! This is not the first time I have profited by your generosity ; and although, I declare to you, it is most painful to me to ” —

— “ There, there, my dear Magnus,” said Mortimer, “ you shall tell me all the particulars hereafter. Come, — come along, and do what I desire.”

And suiting the action to the word, he led, or rather gently drove him into his room, where, according to his friendly solicitation, Magnus mentioned two thousand five hundred pounds as the ultimatum of his temporary necessities.

By dinner-time the Doctor had pronounced Mr. Brassey's fit to be decided ; everything was going on well ; nothing but time, patience, and flannel, were now requisite. If by an additional quantity of the latter article the proportions of the two former could have been

diminished, then Mortimer would probably have felt extremely pleased; but evils that cannot be cured must be endured, and therefore, applying an admixture of good-breeding and philosophy to the case, Mr. Brimmer Brassey was desired to ask for everything he wished, and to order what he pleased; and at a quarter before ten o'clock, Colonel Magnus, having had a long audience of leave of his "legal adviser," took his departure from Sadgrove, bearing with him what was to be considered merely an advance on account of the larger sum which Brimmer Brassey was eventually to procure.

There is something in the succession of visitors at a country-house which produces a mingled sensation of pleasure and pain. The gratification arising from what may be called a "fresh infusion," is sometimes counterbalanced by the regret at losing an agreeable companion; and it sometimes happens, when the visit does not exceed a week, that it is not until the fourth or fifth day of it, that one gets really to like the individual who is des-

tined to go on the seventh ; because, in point of fact, people know nothing in the world of each other who merely meet in London society. There do, of course, exist friendships, especially between women, in London, but those have been grounded and established either by family connexions, or early association : but it is only by the constant intercourse—the juxtaposition produced by the joyous, unstarched (as Helen would have said) intercourse of a country-house, that the real qualities of mind, and temper especially, can be tested.

A ship is avowedly the strongest trial of all : a modern writer has said, that “ he that cannot eat anything, dressed in any way, at any time, out of anything, and this under the sight of any dirt, the effect of any smell, the sound of any discord, and the feeling of any motion, ought not to go to sea.”

This is rather shooting beyond the mark ; because in the sort of ship to which we should refer for an illustration of our principle, the fare would be excellent. The sounds, — probably from the captain’s band,—harmonious ;

the smell, fragrance,—probably from the captain's pastiles; and the cleanliness unquestionable, from the customs of the service. What we allude to is, the close confinement in juxtaposition of some twenty or thirty persons who, by the very circumstances of the voyage, and their entire removal from the "pressure without" of any vexations, mortifications, envies, hatreds, fears, or hopes, beyond the wooden walls of the huge box in which they are packed, are thrown upon their own resources, and have all their feelings and passions *pemmicaned* into that small compass.

It is universally observable, that the greatest object of excitement on board ship, next to the favour of the lady-passengers, is the *cuisine*; and it is wonderful to see how the magnificent mind of man, in its beautiful elasticity, can devote itself and all its energies to so small a point: but no matter whether it be love or a leg of mutton, affection or apricot-tart, kindness or kidneys, as the case may be, the tempers and passions of the people boxed up, develope themselves in a most remarkable

manner. In a country-house, although the interest takes a different direction, the intercourse comes generally to the same point; and a few weeks' domestication teaches us to esteem and love as friends those whom we scarcely liked in general society; and instructs us sometimes to shun the bad tempers and evil dispositions of those who in the circles of the season we have fancied the most amiable and kindest-hearted folks in the world.

Scarcely had the wheels of Colonel Magnus's departing carriage ground the gravel in front of Sadgrove Hall, before the light britscha of Mr. Francis Blocksford was whisked up to it. The person and manner of Magnus did not offer a stronger or more striking contrast to those of Blocksford, than did the arrival of the animated, youthful Blocksford to the departure of Magnus. Magnus, with a look fixed as marble, a pace which might well have suited the march of an emperor to his throne, gravely, grandly, and gracefully stepped into a remarkably low, large, heavy chariot, covered

with caps, tops, imperials, &c.; having below it, a well of vast dimensions, leathern-covered chains, drags, and all the paraphernalia of extensive travelling, and which four horses found quite enough to do to move off with, at a decent pace. Blocksford, in his light, open carriage, — December as it had just begun to be, — with a pair of rattling nags, skimmed along the road, and—hear it not!—with a cigar still smoking in his mouth, leaped from his seat, dashed away his burning comfort, and, running up the steps of the house, bounced into the presence of his host and hostess, and stood before them

“ Like Mercury new lighted on a heaven-kissing hill.”

“ Ah! Francis,” said Helen, jumping from her chair with unaffected pleasure at his unexpected arrival, — for at the moment it was unexpected, — “ how glad I am to see you !”

They shook hands; and I believe, by the motion of his head, or body, or arm, Blocksford implied the possibility of her conferring

a mark of friendship upon him which, in France, he had been taught to consider "nothing at all:" nor am I quite sure that Helen, who really liked him, and who scarcely knew whether he had quite outgrown his boyish privilege, did not look as if she did not think it would have been dreadfully indecorous to have given him so cordial a welcome: nor is it quite clear that the interrogative look which she gave Mortimer, while all these things were flashing through her mind, might not have in one instant curdled his temper, and induced, on his part, the coldest acknowledgment of Francis's warm enquiries after his health. He certainly did shake hands with him, but his manner of doing so struck to the heart of his wife, not perhaps so much on account of poor young Blocksford, whose countenance betrayed no feeling of vexation at the way he was received, as on her own. She saw she had transgressed, and although she could forget, in one sense of the word, she could not, in another, cease to remember the manner in which her husband had before alluded to her having the

task of entertaining the son of his oldest friend, if he arrived during the stay of Colonel Magnus and his companion.

Young Blocksford, checked in his natural vivacity by his reception, looked to Helen as if for some explanation. Mortimer never turned his eyes towards his wife.

“Have you dined, Mr. Blocksford?” said he, without moving a feature of his face.

“Oh! yes,” said Francis; “I thought you would have done dinner before I could possibly get here, so I dined at Worcester. I don’t know how it is, but my mother kept me so long waiting for her commissions, that I did not get away from Cheltenham till near four o’clock. I have got lots of letters and books for you, dear Mrs. Mortimer, and a whole heap of loves and remembrances, and affections and regards.”

“Helen,” said Mortimer, without seeming to pay any particular attention to the speech of his young friend, “perhaps Francis would like some tea: we will go into the drawing-room when you send for us.”

Helen rose; Francis Blocksford rose too, to open the door. Mortimer rang the bell. Helen felt all that was passing in her husband's mind, and was ashamed — not of herself.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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